

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED

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VEDIC PRAYERS

त्वं राजेन्द्र ये च देवा
रक्षा नृन्पाह्यसुर त्वमस्मान् ।
त्वं सत्पतिर्मघवा नस्तरुत्र—
स्त्वं सत्यो वसवानः सहोदाः ॥

Rg Veda, 1.174.1

त्वमस्माकमिन्द्र विश्वध स्या
अवृ कतमो नरां नृ पाता ।
स नो विश्वासां स्पृ धां सहोदा
विद्यामेषां वृ जनम् जीरदानुम् ॥

Rg Veda , 1.174.10

O Indra! You are the Lord of the universe. You, again, are the Lord of all the gods. O great God (*asura*)! You are the vanquisher of our foes. Please protect us, the performers of good deeds. You are the guardian of the righteous (or, the deliverer of the fruits of our actions). You are radiant (*maghava*), and save us from sinful actions. You are ever existent and have enveloped everything by your brilliance. You are the giver of strength.

O Indra! We pray to you to guard us at all times, at all places, and in every way. Please protect our fellow beings, and provide everything benevolent to us. We pray to you to protect our armed forces in their struggle, and grant them strength and courage. May all of us have immense wealth and strength, and a long life.

Did Sri Ramakrishna Fight?

EDITORIAL

The Usual Pictures of Avatars

How should an avatar look like? The traditional pictures of avatars like Rama and Krishna show them as wearing costly robes, crowns, and ornaments. While Rama carries bow and arrows, Krishna has a discus or flute in his hand. Moreover, the *Bhagavadgītā* has declared that God condescends as man in order to destroy the wicked and protect the virtuous. It is the avatar's duty, then, to kill demons and protect good people—to reduce the weight of the Earth. Rama and Krishna were both warriors, and killed thousands of demons. Krishna was instrumental in the Pandava victory in war too.

Coming to Sri Ramakrishna, the most rational of men, Swami Vivekananda, tested him thoroughly and finally called him an avatar. But we see none of the above-mentioned glory in him at all. There's no crown, no jewellery, no kingship and no costly clothes, let alone killing a single demon all his life. If at all he had held a weapon in his hand, it was only once—to kill himself! This new avatar makes a few ordinary people like us—accustomed as we are to traditional pictures—somewhat uneasy. How to reconcile the traditional notion of the avatar with the present one?

When Does an Avatar Come?

Before we proceed further, let's know one thing: When does God incarnate? God is said to descend when unrighteousness (*adharma*) rules the world and righteousness (*dharma*) goes backstage. What is righteousness and what is unrighteousness? Righteousness is God-centredness. The purpose for which human beings have been created is that we should know God. But we human beings forget this often and become engrossed in the world and its goods, in the body and its comforts. To be engrossed in these only means

inviting all vices to rule us. This is unrighteousness. So when righteousness disappears and unrighteousness takes its place, the Lord Himself has to come down to show the right path to human beings. The avatar's glorious life, dazzling character, momentous actions, and vital teachings make such a powerful impact on the world, and influence humanity in such a mighty way, that after a short period of turmoil, an altogether new world takes shape, and the world of unrighteousness is destroyed. For several centuries thenceforth, the effect of the avatar's advent rules the world.

Thus the avatar comes to remind us that we are Divine in human form. Generally, the avatar comes towards the end of a Yuga. When the old dies and the new is knocked into shape, the new Yuga begins. What is a Yuga?

The Four Yugas

'Yuga' means 'epoch' or 'eon'. There are four Yugas according to the Hindu pantheon. They are: *Kṛta*, *Treta*, *Dvāpara*, and *Kali*. In the *Bhāgavata* (3.11.18), it is said: 'The *Kṛta* Yuga is of 4,800 years' duration. The *Treta* Yuga is of 3,600 years' duration. The *Dvāpara* Yuga is of 2,400 years' duration. And the *Kali* Yuga is of 1,200 years' duration.' The years mentioned here are all *divine* years, not human. Between the divine and the human years there is a lot of difference, say the scriptures. It is difficult for us to understand divine years, but we can easily understand human years. For example, between the time of Prophet Mohammed's passing (632 AD) and Sri Ramakrishna's birth (1836 AD) the difference is roughly 1,200 years! This calculation is not of much consequence to us now, as we are discussing the four Yugas.

The Formative Period

The first Yuga—*Kṛta* Yuga or *Satya* Yuga—could be considered to extend from

the 'age of formation' to the 'age of perfection'. In this age, God incarnated as the Fish, the Tortoise, the Boar, the Man-lion, the Dwarf, and as Parashurama. Many scholars have pointed out that this geneological list of avatars is nothing but a symbolic description of the evolution of life. Life evolved from the aquatic stage to the stage of the illumined human being during the first, long Yuga (of 4,800 divine years). This age also produced innumerable spiritual men and women subsequently, who attained the highest spiritual goal, and left numerous records of their spiritual discoveries. The great avatar, Parashurama, killed almost all the Kshatriyas—the warrior race during this age. Then came the Tretā Yuga.

The Age of 'Woman'

The best history of the Tretā Yuga is got from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The term 'Tretā' connotes the number three, and there were three different types of evolved beings in that age. These three types of evolved beings were: the human beings representing good, the demons representing bad, and the sub-human species, called monkeys. Though we find a Vibhishana in the demon camp, a Kaikeyi or a Manthara in the human camp, and a Hanuman in the sub-human camp, the distinctions between the types were clear then.

We have subtitled the Tretā Yuga as the 'age of woman' because 'woman' was the predominant source of conflict of this age. Dasharatha's promising two booms to Kaikeyi at a weak moment, and subsequently Ravana's abducting Sita, led to the *Rāmāyaṇa* story. Rama crossed the ocean with the help of the sub-human army (which too had a conflict around 'woman' involved), killed Ravana, and released Sita from captivity.

When we read the *Rāmāyaṇa*, we often doubt the merit of Rama's conduct in rejecting Sita twice over: once soon after releasing her from Ravana's captivity, and later, when a citizen comments something bad. But at a time when 'woman' was the supreme attraction, Rama as the incarnation had to set an example

by saying that he did not cross the ocean and kill Ravana for the sake of 'woman' but to do his duty. So Rama rejected Sita, and said (cf. 'Yuddha-kāṇḍa', ch. 79): 'The object for which I have rescued you has been fulfilled; now I have no need of you.' Earlier, Rama had easily given up the throne and had gone to live in the forest. That was the ideal of renunciation Rama displayed in his life.

The avatar comes for the good of everyone: for the rich and the poor, for the saint and the sinner. Rama had to take birth in a king's family because the common masses of those days were not powerful, and it was given to a king to kill a demon-king. But Rama also lived in the forest for 14 long years, suffering greatly, so as to be an ideal to the poor.

Apart from this, there is also a geographical significance in the Rama episode. The idea of exploring newer regions of the earth must've come to human beings since then.

The Age of 'Gold'

'Gold' implies wealth and power. The Dvāpara Yuga was dominated by man's urge for acquiring wealth and power. In this age the chief cause of enmity was not 'woman' but 'wealth'. Again, 'dvāpara' connotes the number two. In this age, there were only two types of dominant, evolved beings: the good human beings, and the bad demons. Duryodhana and his 99 brothers, including a host of his henchmen, could be classed under the demon group. Krishna caused their destruction and protected the virtuous Pandavas.

Throughout his life, Krishna demonstrated the ideal of his avatar-hood. As he came for the whole of humanity, he initially lived the ideals of poverty and suffering by taking birth in a prison, shifting over to a cowherd settlement, and growing up tending cows. Even after he killed Kamsa, he seated Ugrasena on the throne and never claimed anything for himself. He spared the wicked Jarasandha's life 17 times in spite of terrible provocation, and on the 18th, himself ran away to Dwaraka from Mathura. The *Mahābhārata*, the history of this age, describes how

Krishna went as an ambassador to Duryodhana's court on behalf of the rightful owners of the kingdom, the Pandavas, and sought at least five villages for them. Duryodhana bluntly rejected the plea, and tried to humiliate Krishna. Later ensued the great Mahābhārata war. Krishna didn't actively participate in the war but, upon request, humbled himself into becoming a mere charioteer of his friend Arjuna. After the war, the mother of the slain Kauravas, Gandhari, cursed Krishna that his race of Vrishnis should perish in 36 years. Krishna accepted the curse too for no fault of his. Such was his sacrifice!

Coming to the geographical part of Krishna's contribution, we see that there is mention of Kālayavana (cf. *Bhāgavata*, 10.50.45), the first ever Yavana or foreign ruler with his *mleccha-koti*, fighting against Krishna in Mathura: the world was expanding! During the great *Mahābhārata* war, there were hundreds of kings from different parts of the world, assembled on the battlefield. The war was over, the end came, and Kali Yuga began.

The Age of 'Woman and Gold'

We next enter the Kali Yuga. The *Bhāgavata* (12.2, 3) prophecies the evils of Kali Yuga in many ways, but we quote only a few ideas (using Swami Tapasyanandaji's translation):

...all excellences like truth, cleanliness, forbearance, kindness, longevity, memory and strength will decay. In the Kali Yuga wealth takes the place of high birth. Mutual attraction will become the sole consideration in marital relationship. Business will become tantamount to the practice of fraud. ... Men will live to eat and not eat to live. A man who maintains his family by hook or crook will be considered resourceful and respectable. Dharma will be observed solely for reputation. ... Greedy and cruel rulers will lay their hands on the women-folk and wealth of their subjects. Stricken by hunger, thirst, and disease, and distressed with worrying thoughts, men in Kali will be short-lived. (Greedy kings will) cross the seas for conquering other continents. On account of

their keen proprietary craving for land, internecine quarrels over ownership of possession arise between father and son, brother and brother...

Has any prophesy about Kali Yuga become untrue? In this Yuga, 'woman and gold' were the sole attractions. And no distinctions! We saw that the noble soul and the demon were in one and the same person. And such persons could be seen everywhere.

The motherland of spirituality, India, whose responsibility it was to teach spirituality to the world, lost its moorings and the very roots of its ancient culture were shaken owing to the influence of alien cultures. Ancient traditions and values were forgotten; God was given up. People became concerned with bodily comfort only. Numerous gadgets were created to satisfy the body's needs. The so-called 'western' culture, ie, all that is related to the welfare of the evanescent body, overpowered the 'eastern', ie, all that is related to the welfare of the Spirit. The world's religions became mockeries, fighting with one another for superiority. Even amongst those who were seemingly religious, the influence of western culture was dominant. Naturally enough, the world became dark as hell. The two powerful attractions, 'woman and gold', gripped the imagination of human beings. They brought all other vices in their train. Thus the life of the masses was one of acute misery. It was into such a world that Ramakrishna came.

The *Bhāgavata* (12.2.16-8) beautifully foresees the Kalki avatar :

...thus, with the advancement of Kali, when men have begun to be animal-like, the Lord will incarnate in a form of Sattva for the protection of dharma. The incarnation of Vishnu, the supreme Lord and the guru of all beings, is meant for the protection of the Dharma of holy men and to liberate them from the bondage of karma. He will incarnate as Kalki in the house of a well-known Brahmin chief of the village of Shambala, who will be called Vishnuyashas.

Ramakrishna's father Kshudiram (a name of Vishnu) was revered by everyone in

that Bengal village, Kamarpukur. Ramakrishna—revered as *jagadguru* or *guru-mahārāj*—was named Shambhuchandra according to the zodiac in which he was born. But being devotees of Vishnu, they called him Gadadhar. About Ramakrishna's body being made of pure Sattva, is there any doubt?

Coming to Ramakrishna's deeds, he never killed demons because he had 'incarnated in a form of Sattva,' and we also see that his situation was altogether different. Ramakrishna's world was extremely complex than ever before. Whom would Ramakrishna fight? The whole world had been conquered by worldliness, by darkness! As he himself commented in a helpless tone, people crawled like worms! The only way to conquer darkness was to bring light. Ramakrishna did precisely that. He became *the* light unto the world. In this super-technology age, arms like the sword and dagger, bow and arrow are useless. Sophistication is needed. You should be able to do everything sitting in a small room.

Seated in the small room of the Kali temple, Ramakrishna lighted the world with his spirituality. After discovering several universal truths after superhuman sadhana, he changed the course of the world's thinking. From darkness to light—that was the change. As the *Bhāgavata* (12.2.34) itself says:

When the Kali Yuga comes to a close, men's minds will develop the power to grasp the truth of the Atman. Then Kṛta Yuga will begin again.

Through his extraordinary spiritual struggle, Ramakrishna awakened the spiritual consciousness of human beings, and thereby destroyed our worldly consciousness. In order to accomplish this onerous task, he had two vital arms: renunciation and faith in God. He renounced both 'woman and gold' *absolutely*. He drove away the enemies to holiness—like faithlessness, over-indulgence, discord, etc—through the power of his renunciation, universality, and faith in God. And thus the Satya Yuga, the Golden Age, was born. The *Bhāgavata* says:

Seated on a powerful steed called Devadatta, Kalki will course through the earth at high speed, destroying the countless plunderers parading as kings. From the time of this incarnation, the Lord of Dharma, Kṛta Yuga begins, and a race of men with Sattva Guna dominating will be generated.

Ramakrishna is called the 'Establisher of Dharma.' His message came straight from the horse's mouth through his vehicle, Narendranath Datta: he used this powerful 'steed' to spread his message at a lightening speed and conquer the 'plunderers parading as kings' with his spirituality. 'Narendranath' means 'the Lord of men'—none else than 'Deva'. Thus, Ramakrishna's taking birth in a poor Brahmin's family, his living in a tiny room in Calcutta, his poor attire, his glorious sadhana—all are significant, and with the march of time we shall understand this better.

Geographically, the idea of a 'global village' has grown with Ramakrishna's advent—not because he was born in a village but because, without his stirring out of his room, his message crossed all borders, an indication of the way things are to be in the future. Moreover, at the junction of the two Yugas, the great wars and killing of millions, etc, which we saw during the last century might be called the transition period.

According to the *Bhāgavata* (12.2.24), when 'the moon, sun and Jupiter come in a single house with the constellation Puṣya, then Kṛta Yuga begins.' We read in *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master* (1.5.3):

The auspicious second lunar day of the bright fortnight and the 25th of the lunar constellations had combined to bring about ... Siddhiyoga. The Sun, moon and Mercury had come together in the sign of the zodiac under which the boy was born. ... Finally, Jupiter which was then beginning to rise, also exerted a strong and auspicious influence:...

The Golden Age, Kṛta Yuga, or Satya Yuga, has come! We needn't have to struggle hard for worldly ends anymore: machines will take care of all our physical needs. We are allowed much time to think of the Truth. □

IMAGES OF INDIA'S PAST

What an Eminent American Feels...

'In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagavat Geeta, since whose composition years of the gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial; and I doubt if that philosophy is not to be referred to a previous state of existence, so remote is its sublimity from our conceptions' (Henry David Thoreau in *Walden*).

The Tale of Plunderers

During the 17th century, the naval establishment at Dacca (now in Bangladesh) was necessitated by the depredations of the Arrakan pirates—both Magg and Feringi, who used constantly to come by the water route and plunder Bengal. 'They carried off the Hindus and Moslems...threw them one above another under the decks of their ships...and sold them to the Dutch, English, and French merchants at the ports of the Deccan. Sometimes they brought the captives for sale at a high price to Tamluk and the port of Balasore, which is a part of the imperial dominions.' With regard to their power it is said that 'their cannons are beyond numbering, their flotilla exceeds the waves of the sea.' They were such a terror to the Bengal navy that 'whenever 100 warships of Bengal sighted four ships of the enemy, if the distance separated them was great the Bengal crew showed fight by flight.' (Radhakumud Mookerji, *Indian Shipping*, pp.211-2).

An Interesting Comment

Itsing, who visited India, wrote about the monks at the Nalanda university: 'In India both priests and laymen are generally in the habit of taking walks, going backwards and forwards along a path, at suitable hours and at their pleasure; they avoid noisy places. They either go away (for a walk) from the monasteries or stroll quietly along the corridors.' (cf, Hirananda Shastri, *Archaeology and Ancient Indian History*, pp. 54-5).

The Effect of Misdeeds

The great Muslim historian, S. A. A. Rizvi, writes: 'Even in the thirteenth century the Hindu merchants in Gujarat impressed the Muslims with their fair dealing. They quoted correct prices and did not bargain. The Lahore merchants, possibly Muslims, quoted double the correct price. This practice was so abhorrent to the Gujarati merchants that, according to Shaykh Nizamud-Din Awliya, they questioned how a city with such commercial practices could survive. Shortly afterwards, says the Shaykh, Lahore was devastated by the Mongols. To the Shaykh, the Lahore merchants' malpractices were responsible for their town's destruction.' (quoted from *The Wonder that was India*, Vol. 2, p. 226).

Sri Ramakrishna and World Harmony

ARNOLD TOYNBEE

We reprint, from The Vedanta for the East (May-June 1959), a famous and brilliant talk on Sri Ramakrishna (omitting some introductory words) by the world-renowned historian, Dr Arnold Toynbee. Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary falls on the 25 February.

I speak with diffidence because I am an outsider. An outsider cannot say anything of much value. Still, I have several things in my mind which I should like to put before you. Firstly, whether one is an insider or an outsider, one is deeply concerned because religion is the most important concern of every human being who passes through this world. Secondly, religion knows no barriers of nationality. It may speak through a Hindu mouth or through a Christian one or through a Muslim one; but if the message does truly come from the source of truth, it speaks to each one of us direct. Thirdly, this [latter point] is the special insight of Hinduism, and the special gift that Indian religion has to give to the world.

Some of the religions that have arisen to the west of India are inclined to say, 'We have the truth.' Hinduism would not dispute this, but it would go on to say: 'Yes, you have the truth; we have it too, but neither of us has the *whole* truth or the same piece of it. No human being ever can have the *whole* truth, because truth has an infinite number of sides to it. One human being will get one glimpse of the truth, another will get a different glimpse. The two glimpses are different, but both are illuminating. Also, two glimpses are more than twice as illuminating as one glimpse. Truth is one, but there are many approaches to it. These different views do not conflict; they supplement each other.'

This recognition of the many-sidedness of religious insight and experience was part of Sri Ramakrishna's message. It was also part of his life, because—if I am right—his life and his

message cannot be distinguished from each other. He gave his message by living as he did.

The goal of Sri Ramakrishna's life was union with God. Having been born in India as a Hindu, he approached this goal first along the Hindu road. Later, he approached it along the Muslim road, and then along the Christian road as well. But all the time he was also a Hindu.

A Muslim or a Christian might say: 'You can't do that. You can't take our road unless you give up all others, because ours is the *only* right one.' A Hindu will say: 'I *can* take all these roads and many more, because they are not mutually exclusive.'

On this point, I myself believe that Hinduism has seen further into the truth than the western religions have. I also believe that this understanding of the truth is of supreme significance and value for the human race today.

Of course, it always has been, and always will be, right and good that we should appreciate and value other people's glimpses of truth as well as our own; but this is particularly important today, when the peoples of the world are facing each other at close quarters, armed with fearful weapons. In this situation, the exclusive-minded, intolerant temper is not *more wrong* than it has been in the past; it has always been as wrong as it could be, but today it is more *dangerous* than it has ever been. The Hindu attitude is the opposite of exclusive-mindedness; and this is India's contribution to world harmony.

Sri Ramakrishna was in this world for half a century: 1836-1886. Look up one of the conventional histories of India dealing with

those years. You may not find the name of Sri Ramakrishna in the index. You will find a lot about war and politics; the establishment of British rule over India; the Indian Mutiny. You will find something about economics: the digging of irrigation canals, the building of roads and railways.

Now open a life of Sri Ramakrishna. Fortunately, he had a disciple who did for him what Boswell did for Dr Johnson. This book is a very full record of his conversations, with a great deal too about his religious experiences, recorded at firsthand by an eyewitness. You will find that this book—it is called *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*—mentions none of the things that fill the conventional history books about India in those same fifty years.

Sri Ramakrishna was born and brought up in a village in Bengal. He spent most of his life in a temple on the bank of the Ganges, only a few miles away from Calcutta. Outwardly, his life might seem uneventful. Yet in its own field—the field of religion—his life was more active, and more effective, than the lives of his contemporaries—Indian and English—who were building the framework of modern India in Sri Ramakrishna's lifetime. Perhaps Sri Ramakrishna's life was even more *modern* than theirs, in the sense that his work may have a still greater future than their work may be going to have.

Sri Ramakrishna's action was communion with God. It drew to him people of all ages, and a group of his younger disciples, headed by Swami Vivekananda, became the first members of the religious order that is holding this meeting here tonight. If I am right, Sri

Ramakrishna himself did not found his order in any formal way. You might say that it founded itself after his death through the continuing effect of his life on disciples who had lived with him during his later years.

There can be few people alive today who are old enough to have known Sri Ramakrishna personally. Most of us today can know him only at second hand, in the way we know, say, Socrates or the Buddha or Christ or Mohammed. But we can measure his spiritual power, like theirs, indirectly by seeing the force and impetus of the religious movement which he set in motion.

In history books written 50 years or 100 years from now, I do not think Sri Ramakrishna's name will be missing (not that it very much matters what does and what does not get a mention). Future histories of India and of the world will, I am sure, have much to say about the practical achievements of modern India. I am thinking particularly of the community development work. This is helping the peasants, in the hundreds of thousands of Indian villages, to realize that they can do something, by their own efforts, to make their lives better. Making them better means making them better materially as a means to making them better spiritually—and this brings us back to religion and to Sri Ramakrishna.

One last word: Indian ideals and western ideals are not mutually exclusive. There is room for them both, and need for them both. Put them together, and they will be able, between them, to do great things for humanity. □

'Vedanta is neither a philosophy nor a theology nor religion, neither a science nor a system of faith nor a theory; neither is it a scripture, nor a code of laws nor a discipline; neither an object nor a subject nor an idea. Neither is it made by man, by sage nor by prophet. It is not made at all; it is ever existent. It is neither of this age, nor of the bygone golden age alone. It is neither of this world alone, nor of the sun or the moon, nor of even heaven alone. Vedanta is said to be, for that reason, infinite and eternal. It is the philosophy of all philosophies, the religion of all religions, and the science of all sciences. The very word "Vedanta" means the end of all knowledge,' says Swami Trigunatitananda.

Vedanta in the United Kingdom

JOHN PHILLIPS

One of the most beautiful presentations this one! It's not easy to say so much in such a small compass, but the author has done it. Mr John Phillips draws a wonderful sketch, in brief, of the entire history of the Vedanta movement in the United Kingdom. Apart from being an important contributor to various journals, Mr Phillips is also the translator, from German, of the ground-breaking work, Ramakrishna and Christ.

History of Religious Life in the United Kingdom

After the Western Church centred in Rome had been split by the Reformation, England had in the 16th century experienced a religious upheaval which ended in the establishment of the Church of England, purporting to be 'Catholic but reformed.' On mainland Europe, however, wars between Catholics and Protestants continued, and by the end of the 17th century, much of Europe was drained and exhausted by internal conflict. Weariness with religious strife was reflected in changes in the intellectual and spiritual climate. The 'Age of Enlightenment' began and with it the intellectual questioning of Christianity, which has become increasingly strong in the West over the last three centuries. The established authorities in England, however, remained almost unaffected by these trends. Church-going remained a



Swami Saradananda



Swami Vivekananda in London

duty for all members of the ruling class, as did loyalty to the established Church of England. It was not until the early 19th century that Roman Catholics were lawfully permit-

ted to practise their religion in England publicly. The Church of England nevertheless retained its strong grip on the English establishment.

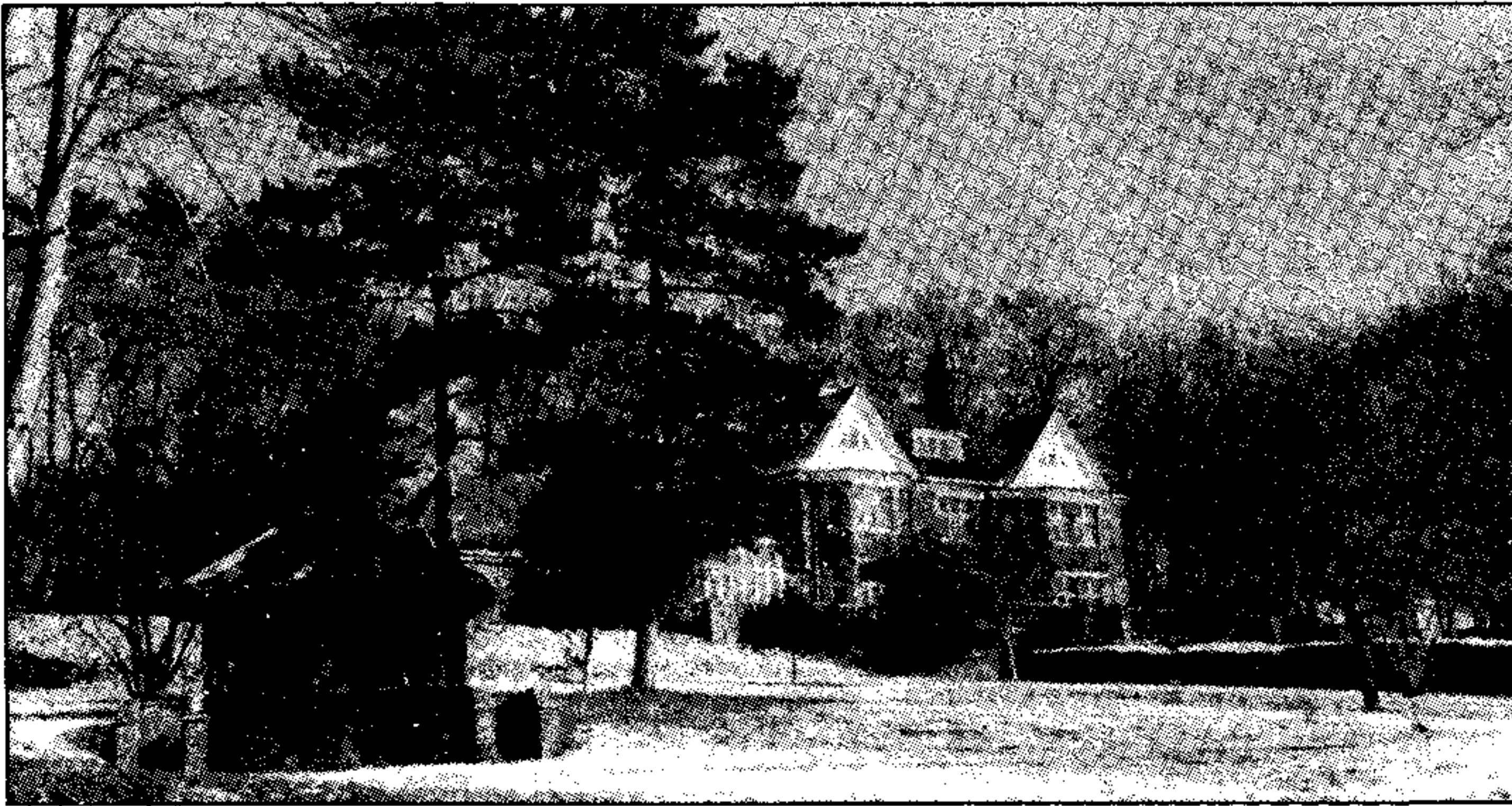
At the end of the 19th century the power of the British Empire was at its maximum.

With the expansion of the empire, the Church of England had sent missionaries to the colonial territories to convert the inhabitants to Christianity. This was regarded by many in England as bringing enlightenment to peoples who had hitherto lived in darkness. These missionary endeavours had met with a measure of success and many people thought that it would not be long before the whole world would be finally converted to Christianity. It was for this reason that the Church of England did not accept the invitation to send a delegation to the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago at which Swami Vivekananda spoke.

Not everyone in the United Kingdom, however, shared the views of the establishment. The 18th and 19th centuries had witnessed an evangelical revival with the es-



Swami Abhedananda



Bourne End Centre After a Snowfall

establishment of dissenting churches, such as the Methodists. Discontent with the way society was constructed, with a rich few exploiting the poor majority, also increased. Movements to correct this imbalance led to the formation of social reform movements, such as the labour party, and the setting up of trade unions.

How Indian Spirituality Came to the United Kingdom

The missionary endeavour to convert the people of the British Empire to Christianity turned out to be not entirely one-way traffic. In order to preach to the people in terms they understood, the missionaries found it necessary to learn something about the religions of the countries they went to. In India they found to their amazement that people were already familiar with the concept of the incarnation. This led them on to discover for themselves

the *Bhagavadgita* and the Upanishads. Translations of these were made and published in England. In this way people in the United Kingdom slowly became aware that Christianity was not the only religion concerned with spirituality. With the founding of the Theosophical Society in 1875, Helena Blavatsky brought Indian spiritual teachings to

Europe in a form accessible to ordinary English people. This was done by the publication of books and also at a more practical level through lectures and meditation sessions.

How Vedanta came to the United Kingdom

In this way, by the time Swami Vivekananda had given his addresses at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, England had to a certain extent been prepared to receive his message. As a result of his lectures and classes in America during 1894 and 1895, Swamiji had been building up groups of followers who would form the nucleus of permanent Vedanta centres in the United States.

After the work in New York had been placed on a firm footing, Swami Vivekananda received an invitation from Mrs Henrietta Müller to visit London to lecture on Hinduism and be her guest. This became known to Mr E.T. Sturdy, who also extended an invitation



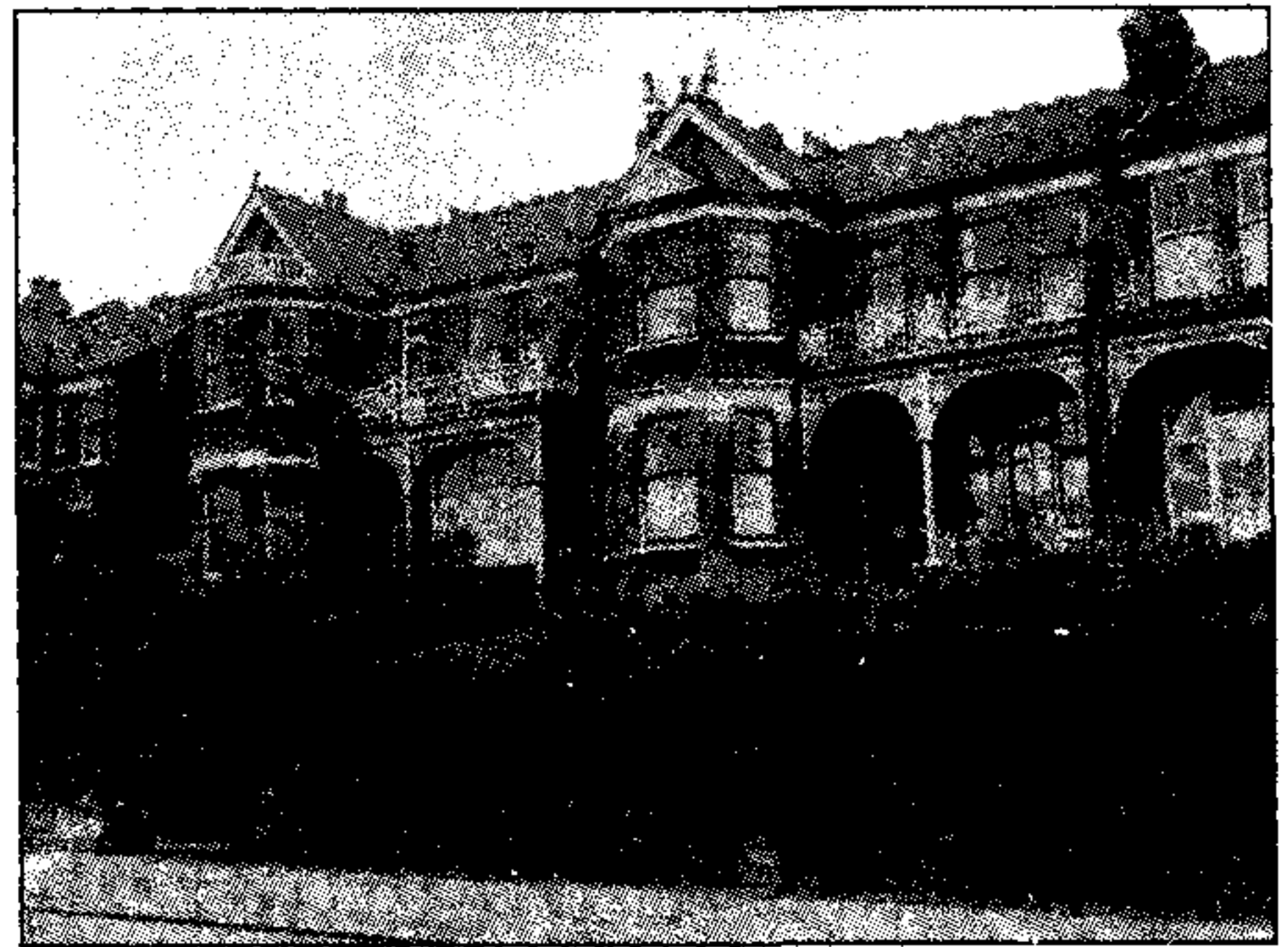
Early Contribution of the United Kingdom to Vedanta: Captian and Mrs Sevier, J.J. Goodwin, Nivedia

to stay with him. Mr Sturdy was a Theosophist with great respect for Hinduism and the Hindu way of life. While engaged in a spiritual quest in the solitude of the Himalayas at Almora, India, he had come into contact with Swami Shivananda. He told him about Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. After his return to London, Sturdy was naturally eager to contact Swami Vivekananda and propagate Hindu ideas. Swamiji thought this a good opportunity to extend his work in Europe.

Arriving in London in early September 1895, Swami Vivekananda became Mr Sturdy's guest and began work almost immediately. His efforts met with even greater success than in America and much beyond his own expectations. In November he wrote, 'In England my work is really splendid.' But although the immediate appreciation of his lectures was great, his more lasting achievement was the recruiting of disciples to carry on the work. These included Miss Margaret Noble, who later became known as Sister Nivedita, and Capt and Mrs Sevier, who helped found the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati.

In England Vivekananda felt that, though the work had started excellently, it required sustained effort to make it enduring and effective, which he was not then in a position to put forth, inasmuch as his American work claimed his first attention. He accordingly wrote to the Alambazar brotherhood for them to spare a Swami to work in London in co-operation with Mr Sturdy. His first choice was Swami Ramakrishnananda, but as this Swami was not at that time physically strong enough, the next

choice was Swami Saradananda, who, however, could not reach London earlier than 1 April 1896, so that Swami Vivekananda had to leave for New York without waiting for him. In New York Swamiji's ad-



66 Dukes Avenue: The Centre was here in 1953

mirers had engaged the services of Mr J.J. Goodwin, a young Englishman, to act as shorthand writer. The latter became a disciple and worked conscientiously for Vivekananda.

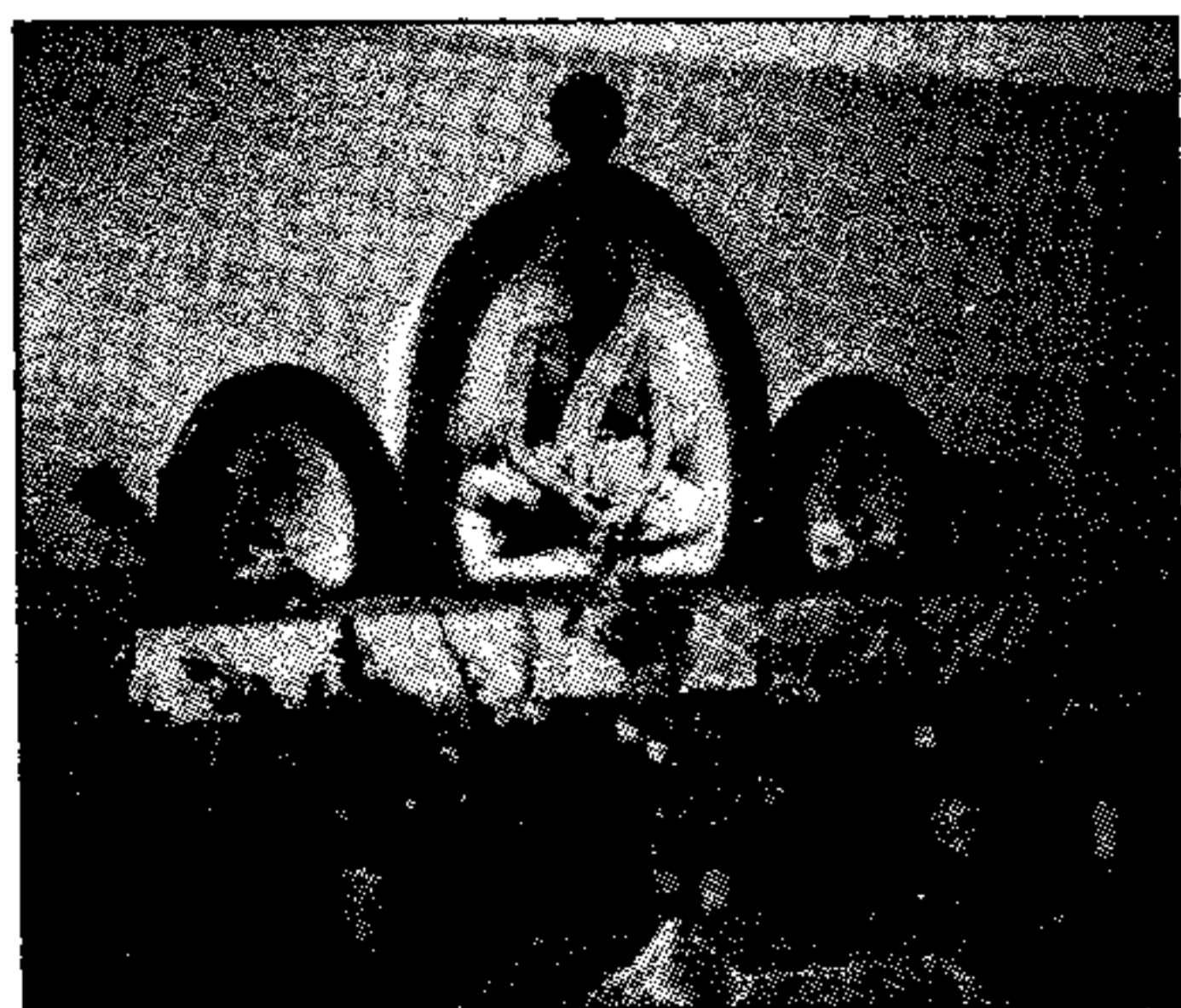
After founding a Vedanta Society in New York in February 1896, Swami Vivekananda returned to London in April. There he resumed his work of lecturing and writing in collaboration with Mr Sturdy. During his stay he got to know Professor Max Müller, who wrote an article on Sri Ramakrishna in the *Nineteenth Century*, entitled 'A Real Mahatman', and then a biography called *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings*, for which Swami Vivekananda had supplied the necessary materials with the help of Swami Saradananda. Another tangible result was his acceptance of Mr Sturdy and Mr and Mrs Sevier as disciples.

Swami Vivekananda now took an opportunity for a much-needed rest and went to Switzerland, returning to London on 17 September. A Swami was now needed in London,

because Swami Saradananda had gone to America. By common consent, Abhedananda was chosen. He arrived in London in September, after Vivekananda had completed his



Bourne End Centre, Front View



Bourne End Centre, Sanctum

European tour. Swami Abhedananda's first lecture in London was warmly greeted and Swamiji could now turn his mind towards India. Accompanied by Mr and Mrs Sevier and Mr Goodwin, he left on 16 December and arrived in Colombo on 15 January 1897.

The work in England had been left in charge of Abhedananda, but Vivekananda recalled Saradananda from America for work in India. Swami Abhedananda had already gone to New York on 9 August 1897, after handing over the London work to Mr Sturdy. From 1902 onwards Swami Abhedananda began to pay occasional visits to England.

Apart from a visit by Swami Paramananda, the next Swami to appear on the scene did not do so until 1944, when Swami Yatiswarananda arrived in Wiesbaden, Germany. From there he visited neighbouring countries, including England. In spite of this lapse of time, Swami Vivekananda and his two brother-disciples had not been forgotten in London. Vedanta teachings continued to attract interest. Moreover, the Order itself had not forgotten.

In October 1934 Swami Avyaktananda arrived to start work in England. He succeeded in gaining a following, and established a Vedanta Centre, but after a visit to the Soviet Union, he espoused the Communist ideology.

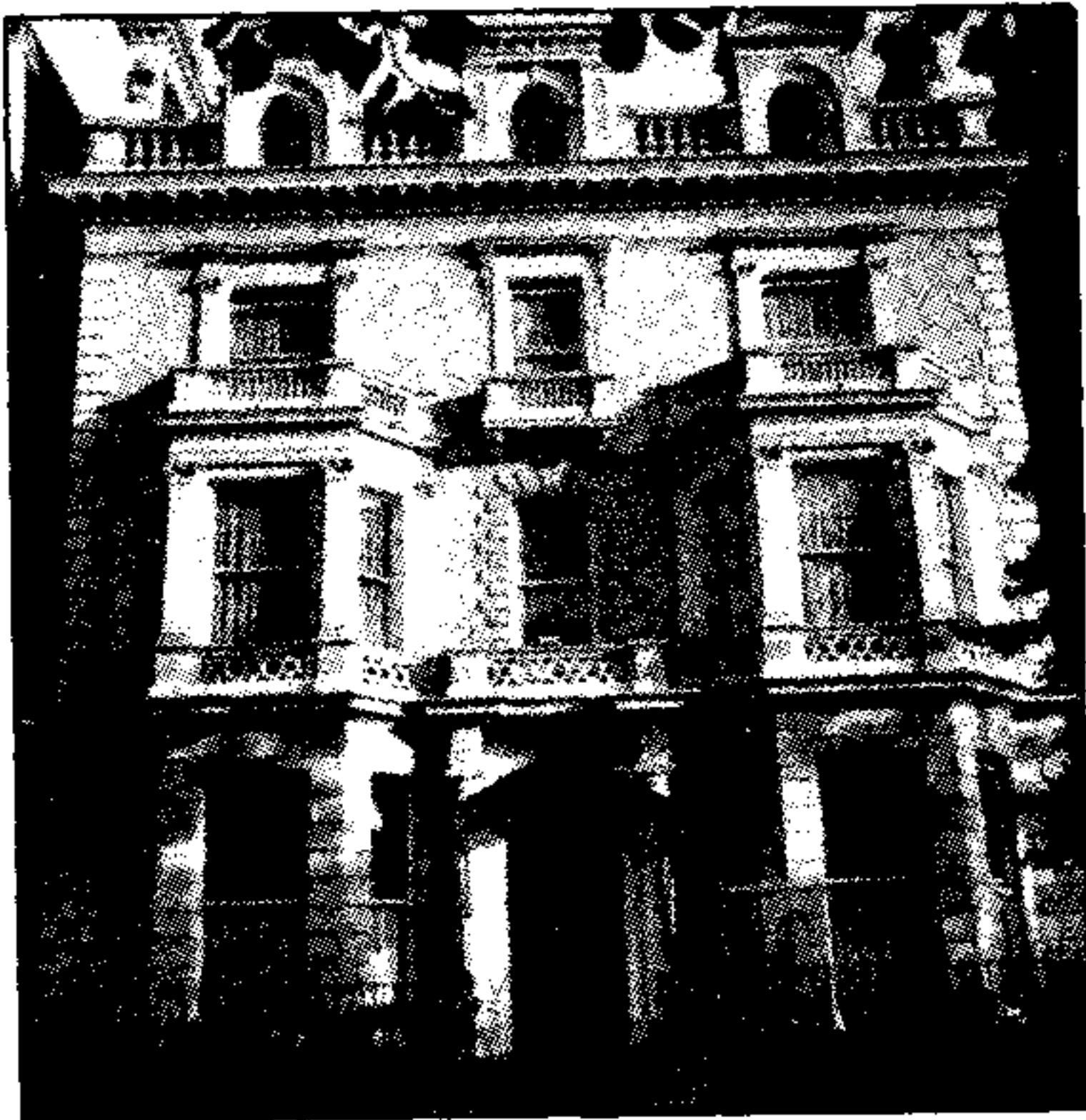
The years from 1934 to 1945 were overshadowed by the rise of the Nazis in Germany and the Second World War, so that the Swamis encountered difficulties in their European work. By the 1940s, moreover, the Belur Math

authorities entirely disapproved of the political bias imported by Swami Avyaktananda into his teachings as head of the existing Vedanta Centre in London. As the Swami would not give up his attachment to what he called Vedantic Communism, he disassociated himself and his activities from the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in his letter dated 16 June 1949, in which he wrote,

among other things: 'I realise fully how wise it is for the Ramakrishna Math and Mission to keep aloof from the conflicting ideologies and political movements in order to serve mankind spiritually and materially.' Meanwhile, in October 1948, Swami Ghanananda arrived in England from Mauritius on his way back to India from the United States, where he had gone after a nine-months preaching tour in South Africa. It was his intention to stay for only a few weeks till a passage could be booked. But, being invited by some people interested in Vedanta, he began preaching in an informal way at 8 Belsize Avenue in the north of London from the very next month. In view of the withdrawal of Swami Avyaktananda, Swami Ghanananda was, therefore,



Swami Ghanananda: He Started the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre in 1948, and later, the bimonthly magazine, Vedanta for East and West (now Vedanta)



54 Holland Park: The Centre Shifted here in 1965

called upon by the authorities to continue his work, and the centre was named the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre. Swami Avyaktananda moved his Vedanta Centre to Bath in the west of England and continued to be active there until his death some years ago.

How the Vedanta Centre in England was Started

Swami Ghanananda started the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre in October 1948, after which the swami's life and the life of the centre became one. He began his work in the flat in Belsize Park referred to above. After two years of work he was still, in the autumn of 1950, in these cramped quarters, uncertain where the rent was to come from. Weekly lectures at Kingsway Hall were however, going quite well. At this point an anonymous donor ap-

peared with financial support. On Sri Ramakrishna's birthday in March 1951 it was possible for the Centre to move to Cromwell Road, South Kensington, a district in the west of London, where the Swami started the bi-monthly magazine *Vedanta for East and West*. In the first few years he contributed articles himself, and he always attended personally to getting material suitable for publication.

In 1953 the property at 68 Dukes Avenue, Muswell Hill, was presented to the Centre by the same donor. Later, 66 Dukes Avenue (*picture on p. 113*) was purchased from a donation given by a lady devotee. This house was used by the lady devotees of the Centre. Swami Ghanananda was gradually training a group of lay disciples, whose service, in the form of financial support and various kinds of work at the Centre, was the indispensable complement of development on the monastic side. Slowly the monastery gained in strength. With expansion the need was felt for more accommodation. This was found at 54 Holland Park, London, a West London street, which became the headquarters of the London Centre.

The acquisition of the property was unexpected. An Englishman who had never visited the Centre, and had never met Swami Ghanananda, came forward with a donation, which made possible this purchase and the maintenance of a more satisfactory building. On Sri Ramakrishna's birthday in 1965 the Swami, to his great satisfaction, performed the

dedication ceremony at the Holland Park Ashrama.

How the Vedanta Centre Developed

In August 1969 Swami Bhavyananda came from India with a view to eventually replacing Swami



Bourne End Centre: The Lush Green Lawns and Sylvan Surroundings



Swami Bhavyananda

Ghanananda, whose health was declining. When the latter passed away in November 1969, he took over the Centre. Activities continued at the Holland Park Centre until eventually it was decided to move away from London to a more peaceful location.

This was found in Bourne End, Buckinghamshire, a village in the Thames valley, about thirty miles from London. The Centre moved there in 1977. The Bourne End site was found to be ideal for spiritual retreats, as it is situated in ten acres of land, so that the main house is set well away from the road. In fact, at least two retreats a year have been held there every year since the Centre moved there.

Under Swami Bhavyananda's able guidance, the Centre was able to improve its assets, extending the main building of the Centre to include a number of extra bedrooms. At the same time a spiritual atmosphere was created and maintained, which attracted those who felt drawn to Vedanta. Contacts were established with the inter-faith movement and the Catholic Church as a result of the Vatican's new policy of openness towards other faiths. Swami Bhavyananda was a vice-president of the World Congress of Faiths. A frequent participant in inter-faith conferences, he was one of the Hindu representatives at the World Day of Prayer in Assisi in 1986; he often represented Hinduism at the multi-faith observance held each year on Commonwealth Day at Westminster Abbey. On a number of occasions the Swami was asked to lead retreats on Christian-Hindu dialogue at various Christian monasteries. Swami Bhavyananda gave much effort to maintaining the monastic basis of the

Centre, ensuring that all the kitchen work (cooking, washing-up and cleaning) was normally done by men, an interesting reversal of traditional roles in English society.

How the Vedanta Centre is functioning Now

Swami Bhavyananda's health began to decline, and Swami Dayatmananda came to the Centre from India with a view to eventually taking over from him. When Swami Bhavyananda passed away in December 1993, the handover was smooth. Since then Swami Dayatmananda has been guiding the affairs of the Centre—ably assisted by the invaluable help of the monastic members and the Board of Management—further extending the buildings to include a new kitchen and dining-room and a much extended shrine, so that many more can attend the worship on puja days.

Activities include talks by the Swamis every Sunday, morning and evening meditation and worship, organised retreats at which devotees may spend several days in a spiritual atmosphere, away from worldly cares and facilities for private retreats.

A special feature of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre in Bourne End, as compared with the other centres in Europe, is the large attendance of devotees of Indian origin. Because of this, the Centre serves a dual function of providing teaching and spiritual guidance to Westerners, while at the same time it is a spiritual centre for Hindu followers of Sri Ramakrishna. In this way it is rather unique, in that it acts as a meeting point between people of differing cultures, where one can make gentle contact with the other culture and learn to accept it, even though one may not adopt it.

Although the Centre has been developed as a monastery, lay devotees are also welcome, and the work has been continually supported by a hard core of loyal devotees, without whose contribution the Centre would hardly have been able to function. □

The Significance of Śivarātri

DR BARNALI DAS

Dr Barnali Das from Noida, UP, is a postgraduate student in medicine. She has been in the field of writing for quite sometime, and in this well-researched article, she studies the significance of Śivarātri from many angles. Śivarātri will be celebrated on 21 February.

Every month, the Kṛṣṇa Caturdaśī day, ie, the 14th day of the dark fortnight, is called Śivarātri or *māsa Śivarātri*. But the one that comes in the month of Māgha (February-March) is christened Mahā Śivarātri, since it is the greatest of Śivarātris, and since the jyotir-linga is said to have appeared on the earth on this day.

The *Īśāna Saṁhitā* has this verse:

*Māghe kṛṣṇa-caturdaśyām
ādidevo mahāniśi,
Śiva-liṅga-tayodbhūtaḥ
koṭi-sūrya-samaprabhaḥ;
Tat-kāla-vyāpini grāhyā
Śivarātri-vrate tithiḥ.*

‘On the dark midnight of Māgha Kṛṣṇa Caturdaśī, a Śivaliṅga appeared, glowing like a thousand suns. This is the day of Śivarātri.’

The Indian mind expresses higher truths in most earthly language through myths, symbols, etc. This helps the masses, devoid of the knowledge of the intricacies of philosophy, practice religion with ease. One such attempt has been the origin and development of the worship of Śiva.

Who is Śiva? One of the sacred Trinity of the Hindu pantheon, Śiva has been usually associated with the destructive aspect of creation. However, Lord Śiva is also the ideal manifestation of compassion, renunciation, grace, etc. Śiva resides in the Himalayas; the silent snowpeaks of the Himalayas represent Śiva in deep contemplation. The moon shines above the Himalayan ranges representing Śiva’s diadem—the crescent moon which he wears on his matted locks. Śiva is snow-white in colour, as we understand from scriptures,

and this stands for the light that dispels the darkness of ignorance. His three eyes represent the sun, moon, and fire—the three sources of light. He has four arms. Of them, two hold the trident (*triśūla*) and the drum (*ḍamaru*); the third has a rosary while he bestows fearlessness (*abhaya*) with the other. Śiva is clad in tiger skin or elephant skin. Serpents form his ornaments. Ashes are his decoration.

About the origin of Mahā Śivarātri, there are several myths: (1) When Brahmā and Viṣṇu disputed each other’s greatness, a huge liṅga or pillar of light appeared suddenly between them, and declared that he who would find the extremities of the pillar would be considered the greater of the two. Both failed. Thus the supremacy of Śiva, who has manifested as liṅga, was established. (2) Mahā Śivarātri is the day when Mahādeva drank *hālāhala*, the deadly poison arising out of the ocean that was being churned by the gods and demons. (3) Mahā Śivarātri is the day of the marriage of Śiva with Pārvatī. (4) It is the day of Śiva’s great dance, the *tāṇḍava-nṛtya*.

What is the real significance of Śivarātri then? A poor hunter once tried the whole day but couldn’t find a single animal to hunt. Night came on and he was far away from home. He was worried about his own safety. So he climbed up a *bilva* tree, which stood nearby. He wished to pass the night in its shelter. But as he lay crouching on the branches of the tree, the thought of his wife and children, starving at home, overpowered him. He was overwhelmed by feelings of pity and tears began to roll down his cheeks. These tears fell on the *bilva* leaves and broke them

down. The leaves fell on a Śivaliṅga that was there at the foot of the tree. Thus the hunter had unknowingly worshipped Śiva! Owing to unavoidable circumstances he had fasted, kept vigil, bathed the Śivaliṅga with his tears, and offered *bilva* leaves to it. So he went to the world of Śiva. This was how Śivarātri began to be observed, they say.

Of all the major Hindu festivals, Mahā Śivarātri is the only one wherein the austerity part (as signified by *vrata*) is predominant. There is practically no festivity, revelry, or gaiety in this observance. Of all the observances, the one that pleases Śiva most, say the Purāṇas, is fasting (*upavāsa*).

Na snānena na vāstreṇa na dhūpena nacārcayā; Tuśyāmi na tathā puṣpaiḥ yathā tatropavāsataḥ.

'Nothing delights me more than the fast observed by my devotees.'

Fasting has a deeper meaning. *Upavāsa* actually means 'being near'. In the context of Śivarātri, it means being near Śiva, ie, to think of him constantly. Again, to abstain from food is also *upavāsa* (*āhāra-nivṛttirupavāsaḥ*). Here, *āhāra* means anything taken through the senses. So, the Śivarātri *vrata* is complete only when we abstain from all kinds of mental and material food, and keep vigil the whole night.

Medical science is also beginning to accept fasting as a means of controlling physical and mental illnesses. Doctors, diet therapists, nature therapists, etc, recommend such fasts and *vratas*. Because of the modification of caloric intake through this—both in quantity and quality—there results decreased morbidity and mortality due to obesity, cardiovascular diseases, coronary artery disease, arteriosclerosis, hyperlipidaemia, hyperten-

sion, cancer, diabetes, and common diseases like anorexia, constipation, headache, abdominal pain, etc. On the Śivarātri day, observing fast and waking up all night makes a person feel light, happy, and spiritually uplifted. It purifies the mind and decreases mental tension.

However, the malnourished or severely ill and debilitated people should not observe such fasts; they should consult the physician before observing fast and waking up all night, because too much observance of fast can cause eating disorders, malnutrition, dehydration,

anemia, congestive cardiac failure, anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, depression, irritability, vomiting, sleep disorders, etc.

Of the ritual part, not much needs to be done by ordinary people on Śivarātri. One of the important names of Śiva is *āśu-toṣa*, 'quickly pleased'. To please Śiva is easy. Just bathing the liṅga with water, offering flowers and *bilva* leaves, will suffice. A better way would be to



worship him at the four quarters (*prahara*) with prescribed mantras, and bathing him with the five ingredients (*pañcāmṛta*)—milk, curd, ghee, sugar and honey mixed together.

In traditional worship, Śiva is worshipped four times during the four quarters of the night. Śiva as Īśāna-mūrti is worshipped by bathing him with milk during the first quarter of the night. As Aghora-mūrti, he is worshipped by bathing him with curd during the second quarter. As Vāmadeva-mūrti, he is worshipped by bathing him with ghee during the third quarter. Finally, during the fourth quarter, he is worshipped as Sadyojāta-mūrti, by bathing him in honey.

Śiva could also be worshipped by bathing him with Ganga water and milk, and offering *bilva* leaves, garlands, incense and flowers. Later, devotees perform *japa*, *ārati*, etc, sing songs, offer food offerings to him, and finally offer themselves at his feet.

One may take a vow to observe this *vrata* for 12 or 14 or even 24 years without a break. At the end of this *vrata*, one has to perform the *udyāpana*, the concluding ritual.

The greatness of Śivarātri is that everyone is equally fit to worship Śiva. There are absolutely no distinctions at all, and that's the beauty of this great God.

We read so much about the worship of the Śivaliṅga. What's the significance of this sacred emblem of Śiva? On the Śivarātri day, we actually worship the Śivaliṅga. Such liṅgas may be movable (*cala*) or immovable (*acala*). The movable liṅgas may be kept in the shrine of one's own home or prepared temporarily with materials like clay or rice or dough for worship. The immovable liṅgas are those that are installed in temples, and have three parts: the lowest part which is of square form denotes *brahmabhāga* and represents Brahmā, the creator. The middle part, which is octagonal, is called *viṣṇubhāga*, representing Viṣṇu, the sustainer. The two parts are embedded inside a

pedestal, the *rudrabhāga*, which is cylindrical and projects outward. It is to this that worship is offered. Hence it is also called *pūjābhāga*. This part contains certain lines, called *brahma-sūtras*, without which the liṅga becomes unfit for worship. Thus in the Śivaliṅga we have the unique combination of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, impressing on our mind the Advaitic idea that God is one. There is no Śiva temple without the Nandī—the recumbent bull always seated in a contemplative mood—and Bhr̥ṅgi, the sage with three legs and three arms.

But the worship of Śiva, as I have said, is simple and Śiva is easily pleased with any sort of worship. By just pouring a little water on his head and offering a few leaves, he becomes pleased. That's the beauty of the Hindu religion.

The observance of Śivarātri may be easy. But it is not easy to describe the true significance of Lord Śiva. As it has been expressed in the *Śiva-mahimnaḥ stotram*, 'if the blue mountain be the ink-pill, the bed of the ocean be the ink-stand, the branch of the large heavenly tree be the pen, the earth itself the writing leaf—and if the Goddess of Learning Herself writes for all time, even then the limit of Śiva's virtues will not be reached.' □

A Sanskrit Rendering of Swami Vivekananda's Benediction

We publish Swami Vivekananda's famous 'Benediction', addressed to Nivedita, and its Sanskrit rendering by Swami Jivananda (d. 1984). Swami Jivananda was a scholarly monk of the Ramakrishna Sangha who composed several Sanskrit verses.

A BENEDICTION

The mother's heart, the hero's will,
The sweetness of the southern breeze,
The sacred charm and strength that dwell
On Aryan altars, flaming, free;
All these be yours, and many more
No ancient soul could dream before—
Be thou to India's future son
The mistress, servant, friend in one.

आशीर्वादः

सङ्कल्पो वै सुदृढहृदये वीरलोकस्य पृथ्व्याम्
स्नेहस्त्रिधां शुचिसुखमयं मातृ चित्तं सुदिव्याम् ।
प्राणस्पर्शी मधुरपवनो दक्षिणस्या दिशो वै
वेदिस्थाग्रौ मुनिगणचित्ते शुद्धहोमप्रदीप्तिः ॥
यत्सौंदर्यं तदपि सततं पूर्णशौर्येण साकम्
स्वप्रातीतं हृदि यदपि तत् सर्वकाले भवेत्ते ।
एकाधारे त्वं भव गुरुः बांधवी सेविका च
सन्तानानां हितसुखकृते भारते भाविनृणाम् ॥

A Pilgrimage to the New World

SWAMI SMARANANANDA

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj is General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Revered Maharaj has been visiting different places on invitation to deliver lectures and promote the cause of Vedanta. He recently visited some of the Ramakrishna Order's centres in the Asia and the West. Upon repeated requests, he penned down his feelings and experiences of the tour. We hope our readers will greatly benefit from these beautiful memoirs, to be published in instalments.

Invited by the Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco, to participate in its centenary celebrations, I started for the USA on 8 April 2000. Going to the New World—the USA and Canada—has become so common these days that writing about it will not appear something new or exciting. Nevertheless, numerous requests from monks and devotees made me decide to write this travelogue with a difference. This is not going to be merely a description of the places visited. This travelogue will include discussions on the 100-year old Vedanta movement in the USA, and also a peep into the new civilization from various points of view, as we are at the beginning of the new millennium. Today, with the conquest of distances owing to all the jet travel, fax, e-mail, web site, and so on, the world is being knit together into a compact whole, making the Vedic dictum *yatra viśvam bhavati eka nidam*, 'where the world becomes one family' true, at least on the physical plane. But, of course, it would perhaps take many

more centuries to bring together this oneness on the mental plane.

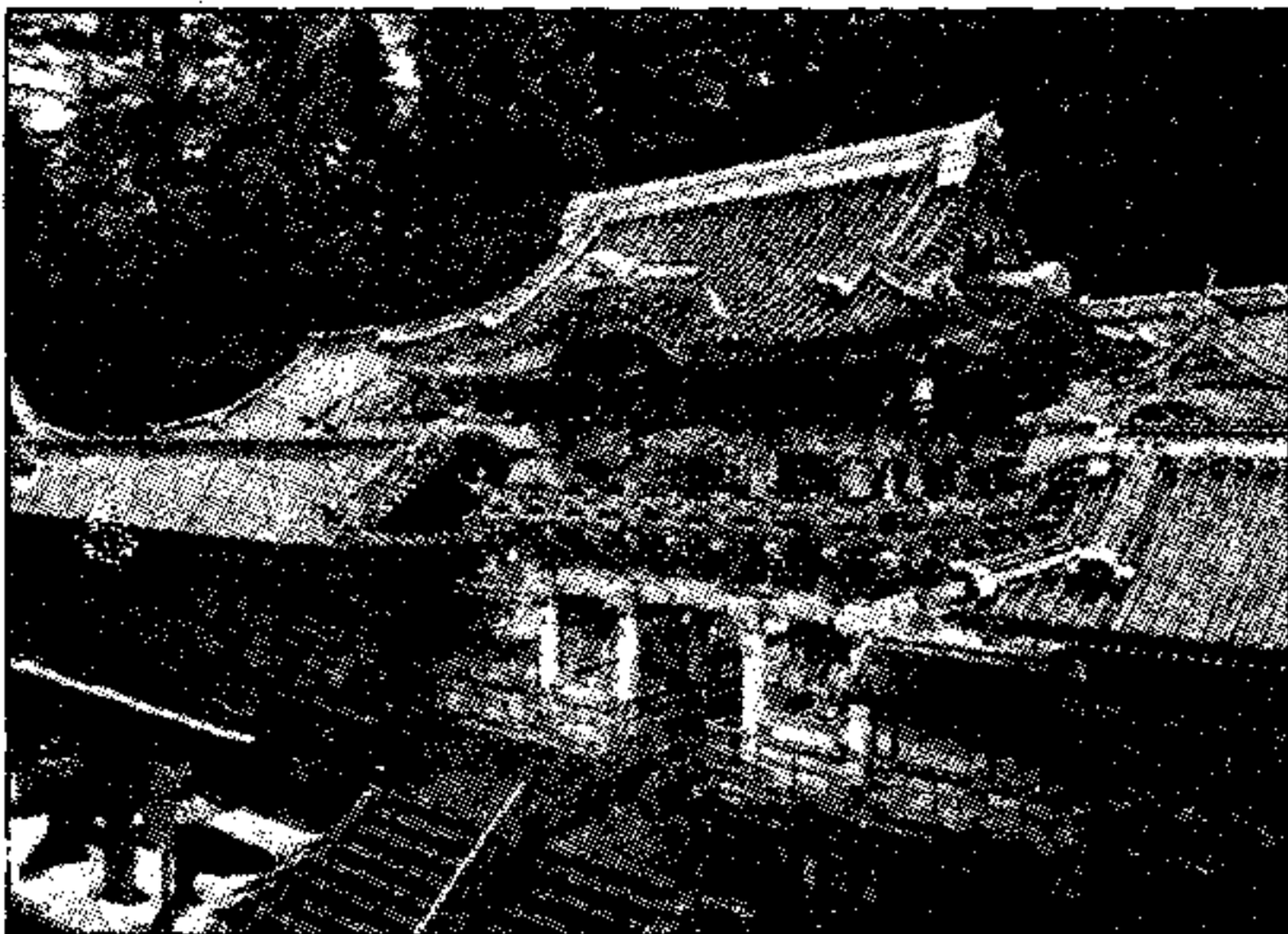


The Japan Vedanta Society: Side View

JAPAN

I left Calcutta on 8 April 2000 by Singapore Airlines to Japan via Singapore. I halted at Singapore for 3 or 4 hours. Continuing my journey, I reached Narita Airport, Tokyo, on the 9th afternoon. It took more than 3 hours to reach our centre, the Nippon Vedanta Kyokai ('Japan Vedanta Society'), situated in Zushi, a picturesque town about 160 kms south of Tokyo. With innumerable cars on the road, traffic is necessarily slow. But metro train services are comparatively quicker. These trains are excellent—clean, fast, and thoroughly efficient.

The Vedanta Society was established in 1959 by a group of admirers of Vedanta, and was taken over by the Ramakrishna Mission in 1984. The pioneers of the Vedanta movement in Japan are Mrs Haru Nakai and Mr Sumitra Row. The former worked hard for



Yomeimon Gate: Toshogu Shrine, Japan

propagating the ideas of Sri Ramakrishna till she passed away at the ripe old age of 92. She bequeathed her house to the Society. It was due to her efforts that *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and some books by Swami Vivekananda are available in Japanese.

The present head of the Society, Swami Medhasananda, is slowly and steadily spreading the message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda among a small group of Japanese devotees. I met the devotees one evening and spoke on 'Spiritual life for Householders' with the help of a devotee-interpreter.

We Indians have much to learn from Japan: their sense of cleanliness, orderliness, discipline, courteousness, etc. The Japanese are soft-spoken. We can hardly hear noises, and we would not feel we are in a crowded city at all. Their aesthetic sense too deserves emulation. Every house, though small, has a small flower bed at the entrance. Having gone to Japan in spring, I was there right in the middle of the cherry blossom season. The cherry flowers were abundantly in bloom. The streets were lined on either side with cherry trees—light purple, deep purple, red, etc. Besides cherry, other season flowers like azaleas and pansies decorated the streets.

As I had to leave for San Francisco, I did not have enough time to visit all the shrines and other places worth visiting in Japan. There are Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines. I visited the Komyogi Temple and the Hachi-



The author (centre) with Medhasananda and devotees
mangu shrine (Shinto) in Kamakura, the ancient capital. On 11 April, one Mr Loni Hersch, an Englishman settled in Japan (he was an admirer of Vedanta, attached to our Hollywood Vedanta Society) took us to Tokyo—a busy, crowded city. No parking space could be found. (This 'parking problem' pursued me throughout the tour! More of that later.) We went to Meji shrine, built in memory of the emperor who brought Japan into the modern age. Situated in an area of 80,000 sq. meters, this shrine contains the 'souls'—not bodies—of the emperor and his queen. We visited the Asakusa Buddhist temple also. It is quite big and artistic. We had lunch at Mr Jyotirmoy Roy's house. He is an alumnus of our Vidyamandira, Belur.

Our Vedanta Centre in Zushi is situated in a picturesque locality. A thickly wooded hill stands nearby. On 12th morning we went up the hill. From the top we get a wonderful view of the Pacific ocean, Kamakura city, etc. Unfortunately, we could not see Mt Fujiyama as it was cloudy.

That afternoon, I had to leave for the Narita Airport to fly for San Francisco. Accompanied by Swami Medhasananda and a few devotees, I left by train at 1 pm. Changing to an express train at Yokohama, we reached the airport well in advance.

I wish I had spent some more days in Japan. There are many interesting places worth seeing in Kyoto, Nara, and other places. But the schedule had to be kept up. So on to the USA. □

(to be continued)



Yamanobe Road, Nara, in Spring: Cherry Blossom

Popularizing Philosophy

ANNOUNCING A NEW SERIES!

There was news in some important dailies that many universities and colleges are closing down their once-prestigious departments of philosophy/comparative religion soon. The reason? With the ever-increasing drive for computer education, there are few takers for these departments.

Let alone universities and colleges. Even in ordinary life people appear to be increasingly losing interest in philosophy. The world is getting busier day by day, and people have no time for such subjects.

*No one is against computer education. On the contrary, everyone is eager that the computer should help humanity in as many ways as possible. But some are worried about the future of philosophical studies. **We, therefore, begin a new series from this month, called 'Popularizing Philosophy'.** Each month, a professor of philosophy will place his or her views about how to popularize this great and oldest subject, so that all may become interested in it. Please read the first opinion which follows.*

Beads Without a String

Philosophical Studies for the Future

PROF ARVIND SHARMA

Prof Arvind Sharma, Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University, Canada, is an internationally reputed scholar. He presents his excellent views this month.

When a certain world-view becomes dominant, it is extremely difficult to present a point of view which is at odds with it. But this is precisely what I have set out to do in this article.

It is helpful to begin by realizing that dominant perspectives can change, or at least shift. For instance, friendship between India and China was an article of faith in the foreign policy of Pandit Nehru in the 1950s; but after the border war with China, the situation changed abruptly in the 1960s. Should one be

tempted to consider this as merely a change in policy rather than ideology, let us take up another example. Ever since the Nehruvian dispensation became firmly established in India, it was extremely difficult to criticise the ideology of socialism. That was in the 1950s. In the 1990s the focus was on state disinvestment in the economic sphere rather than on state investment. Once again, what was once considered heretical is now acceptable.

The point then is that the climate of opinion changes: sometimes in half a century,

sometimes in a decade, sometimes in a century. Around the middle of the 19th century, by the time British rule was firmly established in India, whole generations of Indians grew up singing the praises of British rule over India. But by the middle of the 20th century the perception had turned full circle, culminating in the dissolution of the Raj. So this time the turnaround took a century. Sometimes a shift takes centuries. For instance, prior to the Reformation, it was virtually sacrilegious to speak of secularization or 'science' or a secular state. Now in our own secular times it is equally heretical to even think of theocracy. The point then is that perspectives can change drastically over time.

We will do well to remember that one should not allow one's thinking to be completely influenced by the prevalent climate of opinion given the evidence above about how a countervailing climate of opinion can supervene.

All this is by way of prologue to what I intend to say now, because what I am going to say runs counter to the current of our times. My point is a simple one: that even in this age of globalization and renewed capitalism, when India's software engineers are being sought the world over, some of India's best minds must devote themselves to maintaining and strengthening the religious and spiritual traditions of this country. 'But should they not go into science?' you will ask. They should—many should, but *not all*. Some of the brightest brains of our country must always be engaged in preserving and propagating its religious and spiritual traditions.

What is the need, one may ask. The need of the day is to modernize in order to make the country prosperous. It is true that this is the need of the day, but we must not forget about the *end* of the day. Let us suppose that in the course of the next century India becomes the most prosperous nation in the world but that

in the course of doing so it now had no tradition of classical music or dance, no reciters of Vedas, no expounders of Vedānta—because *all* of its brightest brains had gone into science and business. What a terrible time for the realization to come that one does not live by bread alone, when one's cupboards are overflowing with bread.

You might turn round now to say that this prognosis is too pessimistic. A prosperous India will be able to *revive* all these Indic arts and sciences because it will have the means to do so. But will it have the mind left to do so, if it continues to be unmindful of its religious and philosophical tradition?

One may have all the beads but without the string there will be no necklace.

And what I am speaking about now is the loss of this string—this connecting thread. It is there, hidden underneath the beads of the necklace and somehow we have formed the impression, because we do not see it, that all we need to make a necklace are the beads. But once that unseen string is lost the beads would not a necklace make. That string is the religious-philosophical tradition of India.

And one could not get another necklace of beads in a hope that time could flow backwards. For as matters stand the string—the unseen string—which holds our culture together, is that of its continuity from times immemorial. That thread has been maintained to this day because some of India's best minds and most sensitive hearts have *always* been able to deny the allurements of the hour and the temptation of the season, for the sake of preserving what they felt was of lasting value. This is how India has outlasted many other civilizations and cultures. No cultural or religious tradition is more than a generation away from oblivion. Let not history record that we were the ones who couldn't run with the baton because we were distracted by the cheerleaders. □

'One can understand the Bhagavata well if one has already studied the Nyāya, the Vedānta, and the other systems of philosophy,' says Sri Ramakrishna. (cf. Gospel, p. 639).

Interreligious Dialogue

We published a symposium on Interreligious Understanding last month, in which scholars from all religions took part. It was appreciated by our readers. Sri Ramakrishna, whose birth anniversary falls on the 25 February, was fond of interreligious harmony. A beautiful way of adoring him on this occasion would be to publish the following an interreligious dialogue. The participants of this month's dialogue are:

Hinduism	Swami Nityasthanandaji , Editor, <i>Viveka Prabha</i>
Christianity	Prof Dr Thomas Manickam , President, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore
Islam	Kazi Abdul Wadud

The Hindu Viewpoint

Swami Nityasthananda

Swami Nityasthanandaji is Editor, Viveka Prabha, the Kannada monthly of the Ramakrishna Sangha. The Swamiji has translated numerous works from English and Bengali into Kannada, and has chaired the board of editors for the revised translation of Swami Vivekananda's works into Kannada. These apart, he has several important works to his credit. In this brief but brilliant write-up, Nityasthanandaji presents the global nature of Hinduism.

We are living in a world where all things are mutually related; not a thing is separate from something else, and nothing can remain isolated. In a beautiful article in *Los Angeles Times* (27 July 2000) titled 'Nothing New Under the Sun, or in It,' K.C. Kole writes: 'According to some estimates, at least a few of the molecules we suck up in every breath almost certainly spent some time in the lungs of Cleopatra or Napoleon. And so it goes. No matter where you look, the stuff of Earth has been there, done that, somewhere, somehow, before.' We cannot imagine completely dispa-

rate things in this universe—absolute particularity is impossible. Anything separated from the whole of which it is a part loses its real purpose of existence. Each part of the body is inseparably related to the whole body, and when a part is severed from the body, it loses its meaning and value, as it is relevant only as part of the whole. In the same manner, all things are subsumed in the totality of existence. In this connection we are reminded of Swami Vivekananda's following statement: 'The individual's life is in the life of the whole, the individual's happiness is in the happiness of the whole; apart from the whole the individual's existence is inconceivable—this is the eternal truth and is the bedrock on which the universe is built.'¹

1. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol. 4, p. 463. [Hereafter, *Complete Works*]

Things are not only inseparable from one another and interrelated, they are within each other too; for in the ultimate analysis, everything in this universe is made up of the same essence. The integral vision of the Upaniṣadic seers corroborates this truth. In the *Īśa Upaniṣad*, we read:

*Yastu sarvāṇi bhūtāni ātmanyevānu paśyati;
sarvabhūteṣu cātmānam tato na vijugupsate.*

'One who sees all beings within the Self and the Self within all beings will never resent anything.'

This idea of interpenetration applies to everything in this universe. As Swami Vivekananda says, this physical body is a small ripple in the universal ocean of matter. Every particle of the body is being transmitted every moment from one body to another, from the body to things, from one thing to another thing. The world of thought is not excluded from this. No thought is independent—each is a result of the production of the others. In the article from *Los Angeles Times* mentioned above, the author quotes the astronomer Alan Dressler: 'The history of chemicals in this galaxy is the history of chemicals that produced our bodies. But the details of that aren't known.' Mikhail Naimy says:

I say to you, your very flesh and bone are not the bone and flesh of you alone. Innumerable are the hands that dip with you in the same flesh pots of earth and sky whence come your bone and flesh and whither they return. ... Nor are your thoughts the thoughts of you alone. The sea of common thought does claim them as her own; and so do all the thinking beings who share that sea with you.²

This concept of solidarity of the universe so eloquently stated and demonstrated in the Vedānta must be made to bear upon every aspect of human endeavour to ease tensions between different individuals and groups. The proper understanding of the fact that everything is inter-connected in this universe,

that everything is an interrelated web, will help us disentangle ourselves from the ego-centric identification with different groups of caste, language, race, etc.

Let us apply this to religion. Religion represents human aspiration for the ultimate Reality of the universe. But the expression of this aspiration differs from one race to another due to cultural variations, and because of this we have different religions. This is inevitable because diversity is the law of nature. We must have the magnanimity to accept the differences in religion without trying to glorify our own religion at the cost of others' faiths. We must be able to say that 'religious plurality is the homage which the finite pays to the inexhaustibility of the Infinite.'

The whole thrust of religious practices is to eliminate the ego—the finiteness of our existence—and identify ourselves with the Infinite. But unfortunately we are reinforcing our ego by sticking on to our own sectarian religion and claiming supremacy to it; and this unleashes all bitter feeling, hatred, violence, etc, reducing man to the level of the brute instead of making him divine, which is supposed to be the goal of religion. Giving up this ego-centric identification with our religion we must develop the attitude of the Vedic seer, who said:

*Janam bibharti bahudhā vivācasamnānā
dharmānam prthivī yathaukasam;
Sahasram dhārā dravinasya me duham
dhruveva dhenuḥ anapāsphuraṇti.*

—*Atharva Veda*, 12.1.45

'This earth is the abode of the people of different languages and different religions. Like an immovable cow this earth is providing nourishment in innumerable ways.'

Here, the observations of Arnold Toynbee about the Indian religious attitude are worth mentioning:

The Indian religions are not exclusively-minded. They are ready to allow that there may be alternative approaches to the mystery. I feel sure that in this they are right, and this catholic-minded Indian religious spirit is the way of

2. Mikhail Naimy, *The Book of Mirdad* (Arkana, 1993).

salvation for human beings of all religions in an age in which we have to learn to live as a single family if we are not to destroy ourselves.

This spirit of catholicity must be adopted by every religious person in spirit, and it must be followed by action and not merely declared in speeches on platforms.

What is important is, we have to concentrate on the essential aspects of Religion rather than on peripheral differences, which sometimes appear to be crude and disdainful. We have to emphasize the spiritual aspiration and transformation of consciousness—which is common to all religions if properly understood—without which all the religious practices followed by people professing different religions lose all meaning and value, and make them more dogmatic, endangering the peaceful existence of humanity. The over-emphasis on non-essentials of religions begets sectarianism, bigotry, and fanaticism, and these 'have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilization and sent whole nations to despair.'³ This has happened to such an extent that it made somebody remark that 'God gave humans the truth and the devil came and offered, "I'll organize it for you and call it religions.'"

We have to transcend the narrow limits of our own religious denominations and become universal in spirit, as exemplified in the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, about whom Albin R. Gilbert says: 'It seems to me that very few spiritual leaders have soared so far beyond culture into which they had been born as Sri Ramakrishna did. He is like a singular mountain peak towering over smaller summits, and overlooking reaches which are beyond horizon from lesser heights.'

When we stand before God we are neither Hindu nor Christian nor Muslim. We stand naked like small children before Him, being stripped of all denominational cloaks. In

the words of Jesus Christ, 'Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven' (*St Matthew*, 18: 3,4).

Let us remember that we are all 'Children of Immortality,' and together march towards the eternal Abode, which is the common destiny of all religions. If it is the destiny of only one religion, it stands to reason that it cannot be the eternal abode. What is eternal must be universal and what is universal must be common to all, whatever may be the variation in creed or colour. A popular Sanskrit saying states:

*Eka-varṇam yathā dugdham
bhinna-varṇāsu dhenusū;
Tathaiwa dharma-vaicitryam
tattvam-ekam param smṛtam.*

'Cows of different colours produce milk of the same colour. In the same manner, religions may vary, but the ultimate Reality is one.'

When we study the different religions deeply and dispassionately, we come to know that no religious thought—whether noble or ignoble—is the exclusive property of any one religion, and saintliness is the common asset of all religions. Each religion exists in the other; no religion is completely independent, as in the case of other aspects of human situation. So the exclusive claim for any one religion is detrimental to its own existence. Even if it is possible to make all the people of the world accept any one religion, it cannot retain its self-identity for a long time because it has to go on dividing itself, as human nature cannot be changed. So let us accept and appreciate the differences in religious approach and try to accommodate others' religious feelings in our bosom, and being established in the universal attitude, let us proclaim with Swami Vivekananda: 'We reject none, neither theist, nor pantheist, monist, polytheist, agnostic nor atheist; the only condition of being a disciple is modelling a character at once the broadest and the most intense.'⁴ *

3. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p. 4.

4. *Complete Works*, Vol. 4, pp. 356-7.

The Christian Viewpoint

PROF DR THOMAS MANICKAM

Prof Dr Thomas Manickam is President, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore, which is a premier institution teaching Christian theology among other subjects. Having been in the field of interreligious harmony for years, and having written on and discussed the theme on many occasions, Prof Manickam's ideas carry the weight of authority.

Introduction

The Christian perspective of interreligious understanding is best highlighted from the official teachings of the Church and their Christian interpretations and practice. Let me take a look at some of the official pronouncements on the Church's understanding of other religions offered in the Second Vatican Council, held in 1962-65, and in the subsequent instructions of the authorities of the Roman Catholic Church given to the people from time to time for their right understanding and practice. Christian theologians, and Teachers in the Catholic Theological Faculties the world over have published innumerable writings, books, articles and other audio-video media related to this subject to such an extent that we cannot overlook the vast area of literature in this regard. I cannot even make reference to all of them here in this short article, but to highlight some of the most commonly accepted Christian thinking about this very interesting topic.

The Basic Vision of Christ Regarding True Religion and Worship

The context of the following discourse of Jesus is his dialogue with the Samaritan woman as recorded in *St John* (4: 20-26). The Samaritan woman said to Jesus:

My Samaritan ancestors worshipped God on this mountain, but you Jews say that Jerusalem is the place where we should worship God.

Jesus said to her:

Believe me, woman, the time will come when people will not worship the Father either on this mountain or in Jerusalem.

You Samaritans do not really know whom you worship; but we Jews know whom we worship, because it is from the Jews that salvation comes. But the time is coming, and is already here, *when by the power of God's spirit, people will worship the Father as He really is, offering Him the true worship that He wants. God is Spirit, and only by the power of His Spirit can people worship Him as He really is.*

The woman said to him: 'I know that the Messiah will come, and when he comes, he will tell us everything.' Jesus answered: 'I am he, I who am talking with you.'

Regarding the practical aspect of this true worship of God in His Spirit and expressing such worship in the real practice of service as part of the worship of God is given by James, another disciple of Jesus, as follows:

What God the Father considers to be pure and genuine religion is this: *to take care of orphans and widows in their suffering, and to keep oneself from being corrupted by the world* (James' Letter, 1:27).

From the above sources of Christian vision of authentic religion as taught by Jesus and further instructed by the disciples of Jesus in their own Christian communities, it is clear that religion is a matter of worshipping God in Spirit and Truth, and moved by the worship of God doing service to humans who are suffering, and thus experience and express our love of God by sharing it with our fellow human beings as 'Love in Service.' It is in this tradition that Christianity spread as a 'Relig-

ion of Love of God and Love in service to humanity.'

But this kind of 'religion' need not be a monopoly of Christianity. Any religion worth its authentic vision of Truth and Love can be another model, and then there need not be any rivalry and conflict between these two or more models. Even Jesus himself highlighted this point when he instructed his disciples on a similar rivalry claim by his own disciples in a particular context. The context is described in *Mark* (9: 38-41) and in *Luke* (9:49-50). The context and content are the following:

John said to the Master: 'Teacher, we saw a man who was driving out demons in your name, and we told him to stop, because he doesn't belong to our group. ...' 'Do not try to stop him,' Jesus told them, 'because no one who performs a miracle in my name will be able soon afterwards to say evil things about me. *For whoever is not against us is for us.* I assure you that anyone who gives you a drink of water because you belong to me will certainly receive his reward.'

It is obvious from the above teachings that true religion is a matter of loving God and serving humanity, and helping people to discover a meaning for their life in relation to God's ultimate concerns for mankind. It is our common duty to discover this common religious purpose and live and work and complement each other for the better fulfilment of this human task (*mānava-dharma*) for the welfare of the entire universe (*loka-saṁgraha*). All the sacred scriptures of all religions are fundamentally teaching this universal religious Truth of the Spirit, though in some practices of some religions there are some aberrations which could be corrected with interreligious dialogues, mutual learning and service collaboration as well as spiritual interactions, for which we have to be open.

Catholic Church's Understanding of Other Religions

The Christian understanding of other religions is more clearly articulated by the official teaching authority of the Catholic Church,

the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council held in Vatican during 1962-65, in its official *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to other Religions* (*Nostra Aetate...*), as follows:

All peoples comprise a single community, and have a single origin, since God made the whole race of humans dwell over the entire face of the earth. One also is their final goal: God. His providence, His manifestations of goodness, and His saving designs extend to all humans. ...

Mankind look to the various religions for answers to those profound mysteries of human condition which, today even as in olden times, deeply stir the human heart. What is man? What is the meaning and purpose of our life? What is goodness and what is sin? What gives rise to our sorrows and to what intent? Where lies the path to true happiness? What is the truth about death, judgement, and retribution beyond the grave? What, finally, is that ultimate and unutterable mystery which engulfs our being, and whence we take our rise and whither our journey leads up? (*Nostra Aetate*, Art 1, paragraph 2).

From ancient times down to the present, there has existed among diverse peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things, and over the events of human life; at times, indeed, recognition can be found of a supreme Divinity and of a supreme Father too. Such a perception and such a recognition instill the lives of these peoples with a profound *religious sense*. Religions bound up with cultural advancement have struggled to reply to these same questions with more refined concepts in more highly developed language.

Thus in Hinduism people contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an unspent fruitfulness of myths and through searching philosophical enquiry. They seek release from the anguish of our condition through ascetical practices, deep

meditation or a loving, trusting flight toward God.

Buddhism in its multiple forms acknowledges the radical insufficiency of this shifting world. It teaches a path by which people in a devout and confident spirit can either reach a state of absolute freedom or attain supreme enlightenment by their own efforts or by higher assistance.

Likewise, other religions to be found everywhere strive variously to answer the restless searchings of the human heart by proposing 'ways', which consists of teachings, rules of life, and sacred ceremonies.

The Catholic Church ... looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and of life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all humans.

The Church therefore has this exhortation for her children: prudently and lovingly, through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, and in witness of Christian faith and life, acknowledge, preserve, and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among these people, as well as the values in their society and culture (Art. 2).

Thus, as is evident from these excerpts of the official teaching of the Catholic Church quoted above, the Christian attitude towards other religions is very positive. In the introductory paragraph of the *Nostra Aetate*, it is said: *'In her task of fostering unity and love among people, and even among the nations, the Church gives primary consideration ... to what human beings have in common, and to what promotes fellowship among them.'* Further, with such a positive attitude towards other religions and their faith systems and teachings and practices, the Church also invites all humans of good will to work together for safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace and freedom (*Nostra Aetate*, Art. 3).

Christian Dialogical Understanding

Another channel of the Christian perspective of the understanding of interreligious relationship is better expressed in a document issued from the Secretariat for Other Religions, Vatican, on 10 June 1984. This document is titled as *Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions (Reflection and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission)*. Let me also quote some significant statements from this document as it is also coming from an official department of the Vatican. Dialogical Understanding is the new perspective. This perspective has been a growth from the times of Vatican Council held 38 years ago. From a monological attitude, the Christian understanding of the partnership of other religions for meaningful dialogue is certainly a great step towards realizing the mutuality principle. Any dialogue as a frank, free, fearless exchange of views on serious concerns common or particular between two or more partners can be successful and realistic only if the partners respect each other's right to hold positions on truths and realities, historical sequences and consequences, and if they are ready to exchange and share sincerely the enlightened aspects of truth towards which the partners in dialogue are open to listen and understand. Thus the dialogical understanding of other religions is a very healthy approach by which mutual enrichment and enlightenment on truth is freely available to the partners of dialogue. This was first proposed in the encyclical letter of Pope Paul VI called *Ecclesiam Suam* ('His Church'), released on 6 August 1964 during the Second Vatican Council. Since that time it has been frequently used by the Vatican Council fathers and Theologians as well as in allied Church teachings. In this document, *dialogue* has been conceived as a friendly means of honest exchange of views, not merely as a courtesy discussion but also as a means of developing positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed to mutual understanding and en-

richment. The said *Document from the Secretariat for Other Christians* (1984), in its Article 21, describes interreligious dialogue more specifically as follows:

The dialogical approach helps us to discover that we do not possess the truth in a perfect and total way, but can walk together with others towards that goal. Mutual affirmation, reciprocal correction, and fraternal exchange lead the partners in dialogue to an ever greater maturity which in turn generates interpersonal communion. Religious experiences and outlooks can themselves be purified and enriched in this process of encounter.

The dynamics of human encounter should lead us Christians to listen to and strive to understand that which other believers communicate to us in order to profit from the gifts which God bestows so generously. Socio-cultural changes in the world, with their inherent tensions and difficulties, as well as the growing interdependence in all sectors of society necessary for living together, for human promotion, and, above all, for pursuing the demands of peace, all render a dialogical style of human relationships today ever more urgent.

Forms of Interreligious Dialogue

There are three forms of interreligious dialogue described in the *Document of the Secretariat for Other Religions*, mentioned above. They are, (1) the dialogue of life, (2) the dialogue of deeds, and (3) the dialogue of specialists.

The dialogue of life is a manner of living in close proximity and neighbourliness with the people who practice religion different from that of the Christians. It implies concern, respect and hospitality towards the other. It leaves room for the other person's identity, his mode of expression, and his values.

Dialogue of deeds is that of collaboration with others for goals of a humanitarian, social, economic, or political nature which are directed towards the liberation and advance-

ment of mankind. This kind of dialogue often occurs today in the context of international organizations, where Christians and the followers of other religions confront together the problems of the world and work together to solve some of them in so far as such problems come under the purview of religious value systems.

Dialogue of specialists is of particular interest for us today as we are living in pluralistic contexts of cultures, religions, value systems, socio-political ideologies as well as interacting with secular and democratic forces on a global scenario. This type of dialogue normally takes place where one's partner already has his own world-vision and adheres to a religion which inspires him to action. This is more easily accomplished in pluralistic societies where diverse traditions and ideologies co-exist and sometimes come in contact. In this type of encounter, the partners come to mutual understanding and appreciation of each other's spiritual values and cultural categories and promote communion and fellowship among the people.

In Article 35, the same document goes further into deeper levels and says that 'persons rooted in their own religious traditions can share their experiences of prayer, contemplation, faith and duties, as well as their expressions and ways of searching for the Absolute. This type of dialogue can lead to mutual enrichment and fruitful cooperation for promoting and preserving the highest values and spiritual ideals of mankind.' Dialogue thus becomes a source of hope and a factor of communion in mutual transformation.

Scope and Prospects of Interreligious Dialogue in the Future

In order to reflect on these points of scope and prospects of interreligious dialogue, let me share also the fine thoughts which the holy father Pope John Paul II shared with the representatives of various religions, assembled in Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi, on 7 November 1999, for an interreligious dialogue. The Pope said:

It is a sign of hope that the religions of the world are becoming more aware of their shared responsibility for the well-being of the human family. This is a crucial part of the globalization of solidarity, which must come if the future of the world is to be secure. This sense of shared responsibility increases as we discover more of what we have in common as religious men and women.

The Pope further observed that the challenges now facing society can only be met by building a civilization of love founded on the universal values of peace, solidarity, justice and liberty. 'How can we do this, except through encounter, mutual understanding, cooperation?' he asked. He further observed that the *path before us is demanding*, and there is always the temptation to choose the path of isolation and division, which leads to conflict. This in turn will unleash the forces which make religion an excuse for violence, as we see too often around the world. 'Religion is not, and must not become a pretext for conflict, particularly when religious, cultural and ethnic identity coincide. *Religion and Peace go together*. To wage war in the name of religion is a blatant contradiction,' the Pope said, repeating this message he shared with the distinguished Assembly of the Assisi Meeting in 1986. Then he added:

Religious leaders in particular have the duty to do everything possible to ensure that religion is what God intends it to be — a source of goodness, respect, harmony and peace! This is the only way to honour God in truth and justice (Pope's Address, Art. 3).

Our religious encounter requires that we strive to discern and welcome whatever is good and holy in one another so that together we can acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral truths which alone guarantee the world's future (cf. *Nostra Aetate*, Art 2). In this sense, **religious dialogue is never an attempt to impose our own views upon others, since such dialogue would be-**

come a form of spiritual and cultural domination. This does not mean that we abandon our own convictions. What is meant is that, holding firmly to what we believe, we listen respectfully to others, seeking to discern all that is good and holy, all that favours peace and cooperation (Pope's Address, Art. 3).

He also observed that it is vital to recognize that there is a close and unbreakable bond between peace and freedom. Freedom is the most noble prerogative of the human person, and one of the principle demands of freedom is the free exercise of religion in society (cf. *Dignitatus Humanae*, 3). No state, no group has the right to control either directly or indirectly a person's religious convictions, nor can it justifiably claim the right to impose or impede the public profession and practice of religion, or the respectful appeal of a particular religion to people's free conscience. ... Religious freedom constitutes the very heart of human rights. Its inviolability is such that individuals must be recognized as having the right even to change their religion, if their conscience so demands. People are obliged to follow their conscience in all circumstances and cannot be forced to act against it (cf. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Art. 18, re-quoted by the Pope in his *Message for the 1999 World Day of Peace*, Art. 5).

It seems quite appropriate that I conclude this survey of the Christian Perspective on Interreligious Understanding by quoting from the concluding part of the Pope's message at New Delhi, which ends with a silver line of good hope and scope for interreligious understanding in the future:

To choose tolerance, dialogue and cooperation as the path into the future is to preserve what is most precious in the great religious heritage of mankind. It is also to ensure that in the centuries to come the world will not be without that hope which is the life-blood of the human heart. May the Lord of heaven and earth grant this now and for ever. *

The Islamic Viewpoint

KAZI ABDUL WADUD

The scholar who had been requested to write couldn't; so we are publishing the views of Kazi Abdul Wadud, a famous Islamic scholar of yesteryears. This write-up was published in the Swami Vivekananda Centenary volume, titled Parliament of Religions (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1965), edited by the world-renowned historian, Dr R.C. Mazumdar.

In ancient India a workable union of the fair-skinned Aryans and the dark-skinned Non-Aryans could be effected, which was no mean achievement when we take into account the intractable nature of the problem even in the 20th century, and in medieval India the union was markedly closer: Akbar, the great Mughal, built in his harem temples for his Hindu queens, and in the wider life of the country Hindus and Muslims often had spiritual guides in the opposite community without experiencing any social disabilities. And in the 19th century we had the unique spectacle of religious harmony in the endeavours of Keshab Chandra Sen, one of whose disciples translated for the first time the Muslim scriptures and some other religious books into Bengali from the original Arabic and Persian sources. Ghalib, the prince of Urdu poets, wrote in the same age: 'True religion consists in steadfast devotion; the brahmin who dies in his temple deserves burial in the Kaba.' Swami Vivekananda's great utterance that the Indian nation should have Vedantic brains and an Islamic body is in tune with those unforgettable sayings and doings.

But, unfortunately for us, these creative thoughts and endeavours gave way to political proclivities having immediate prospects of tempting gains, with the result that in the 20th century we were landed into really evil days. Awful misunderstandings and fault-findings and misgovernment and feuds turned our land into a veritable hell and led even to its partition. The older days with their limitations

and also with their not-to-be-forgotten charms seem to have been lost for good.

This adverse fate is peculiar not only to India of the modern times, but also to the modern civilized world. The West with all its wonderful scientific advancements underwent worst confusion of thought with the consequent destruction of lives and possessions, in an unprecedented scale. And this sorry state of affairs of the times is responsible for the rise of a powerful atheistic school of thought, which claims that the way to human welfare, nay, even normal human existence, is no longer possible except through its totalitarian methods. The world has not been won over by this lop-sided and grim way of thinking, and its methods are not without blemishes. But its threat is not diminishing in strength because of the continuance of abject poverty and confusion of thought in the vast majority of the people of the world; and the cruel exploitation of the luckless by the crafty who very often belong to the 'haves' is not failing to lend poignancy to the situation.

So we find that not only religions but time-honoured spiritual values also are facing in this age a big challenge and the future worth and prestige of religions and spiritual values will largely depend on how they meet that challenge. Some may think that the economic aspect of our present-day maladies is being over-emphasized by us. But it is really not so. Says Mahatma Gandhi: 'God Himself does not venture to come before the hungry man except in the form of food.' The economic aspect is very often the determining aspect of life. Be-

sides, economic ills are not wholly economic but largely spiritual also. True spirituality and injustice in any form whatsoever are irreconcilables. Let me now look into Islam and the ways of the Muslims and try to see if they are conscious of this new challenge of our age and mean to meet it. Discussion about religion can be meaningful in our age in such a context only. I have quoted the famous utterance of Swami Vivekananda in regard to Islam. It reveals Swamiji's insight into the vital powers of this faith. Of the major religions of the world, Islam is the youngest and its emphasis on the practical aspect of every question is pronounced. It avoids miracles and mysteries to a very large extent. The Meccans asked the Prophet to show them the angels, to have his food direct from Heaven, but the Prophet maintained consistently that he was a mortal and not possessed of miraculous powers, his only difference from them being that he received divine revelation for their guidance. About intricate things like soul and revelation this is the utterance of the Quran:

They will ask thee concerning the Spirit (revelation). Say: The Spirit is by the command of my Lord, and of knowledge ye have been vouchsafed but little (17:85).

The Quran maintains the same attitude towards the metaphysical question: what God really is. It does not countenance such speculations. It tells people not to enquire into the essence of God but to fix their attention on His attributes:

Allah's are the fairest names. Invoke Him by them (7:180).

A well-known saying of the Prophet runs thus: Imbue yourself with the attributes of God.

In other words, the Quran does not think that man is essentially God but wants him to be God-like. The Quran points unerringly to the evil propensities in man which can, according to its teachings, be curbed by man's complete submission to the will of God. In fact, this submission is, according to the Quran, the supreme way of man's fulfilment. Though imperfect, man had this singular fortune that the

Spirit of God was breathed into him and he was made God's viceregent on earth. He is not to bow before anybody except God; mighty things of nature such as the sun, the moon and the oceans, all have been made subservient to him. The great scientific achievements of our times point unmistakably to the validity of the Quranic assertion with only this difference that the modern man with his wonderful control over nature has so far failed to control himself. And why? Because he has not, according to the Quran, learnt to submit himself wholly to God, in other words, to His eternal Law of Good of all.

The Quran considers Islam, in other words, complete submission to God, to be the only way of man's fulfilment. It has been, declares the Quran repeatedly, the religion of all the prophets of the world. At the same time the Quran is conscious of differences of outlook among men which deserve to be respected. Says the Quran:

Revile not those unto whom they pray besides Allah lest they wrongly revile Allah through ignorance. Thus unto every nation have We made their deed seem fair (6:109).

Again:

And if Allah had pleased He would have made you (all) a single people, but that He might try you in what he gave you (discretionary powers), therefore strive with one another to hasten good deeds....

Again:

And say to My servants (that) they speak what is best; surely the devil sows dissensions among men; surely the devil is an open enemy to man (17:53).

We have mentioned that the Quran emphasizes the practical aspect of every question. Naturally enough, it stresses the organized aspects of life, for there is sufficient stress on the importance of the individuals; it lays stress on individual contemplation as much as on congregational prayers, and points out clearly that the individual should not follow the path of the majority blindly:

And follow not that of which you have no knowledge, surely the hearing and the sight and the heart, all of these shall be questioned about that (17:36).

An elaborate treatment of the teachings of the Quran is not possible here. But the brief account we have given of some of its cardinal principles will, we trust, give you some idea at least of the outstanding worth of those principles. Swami Vivekananda wanted to have a man-making religion. I think the Quranic principles, alluded to, are really meant to be man-making. They avoid metaphysical abstraction conspicuously.

But the big question is: Have these principles taken adequate shape in the life of Mussalmans? Have they, I mean, the principles, succeeded in making Mussalmans something like viceregents of God on earth—of course we do not mean supermen, but men and women whom Muslims and non-Muslims alike can recognize to be able and energetic and full of understanding for fellowmen?

That the Mussalmans as a brotherhood have praiseworthy things about them, particularly in their collective lives, is admitted. But we cannot say that they are mindful of the great and life-giving objective set before them by the Quran—and that is a great shortcoming indeed. For people, not propelled by live thoughts and big urges, have somehow endangered their distinctive worth as well as their balance.

So the threat of our times which we have discussed earlier is real for Mussalmans also. Their commendable social structure cannot help them much as they lack the most important asset of life, namely, living thoughts. The two major communities of India, Hindus and Mussalmans, seem to be markedly deficient in two outstanding things of life. The Mussalmans' social life is fairly good, its structure is almost modern but as a brotherhood they have not experienced yet the emancipation of the intellect which Europe experienced during the long years of her Renaissance—and thus, so to say, a rebirth which has ushered in the

modern age. The Hindus, thanks to the exertions of their 19th-century stalwarts, have experienced that emancipation to a considerable extent, but the structure of their social life is still of the old world and their spirit, chaffing under unhelpful surroundings, is often found to be impatient of discipline and creative thoughts.

The picture we have drawn of the intellectual and spiritual deficiencies of our people will not, we hope, be considered fantastic. But what is the remedy will perhaps be the general cry. We admit frankly that it is always hard to find out remedies as the malady or maladies are almost always very old. But as the challenge is impatient we have to give a quick answer, and quick answers are not necessarily wanting in value because the value of an answer depends largely on the quality of apprehension of the question. If we feel that we have apprehended the meaning of the new challenge, we should not take long to be ready with our reply.

The challenge is considered to be mainly economic. But in reality it is moral. Innumerable men and women have been and are still being denied justice—that is the plain position. Human nature with all its animality is moral, it cannot therefore tolerate such injustice for all time to come. This is precisely what the great religions also taught. But the teaching has so long been neglected and side-tracked. The time has come to rectify the mistake.

But how to do this rectification? This question is also considered to be very difficult—of course by those who do not mean to act. The imperative need is to realize that the injustice should no longer be tolerated. But how to end the injustice? Who will do it? Why, those who feel the bite of the injustice. They are to will with all their hearts and minds that the injustice should be ended. Their will will go on revealing ways before them—will help life that way. Such men of will may not be counted by legions, but they are not insignificant in number and, fortunately, they are still

to be found in every faith. Let them come forward and take the resolution that they mean to do honour to their faiths by dedicating themselves to the cause of justice and fair play for all (this being the most emphasised aspect of every religion) and they will have no truce with double-dealing in any form. Such dedicated pioneers have always been the salt of the earth. The power of sincere and earnest thought is incalculable indeed.

Politicians, particularly those belonging to 'free' countries, who have now become the natural leaders of men, should think seriously as to what should be their line of action henceforward. As a rule they are votaries of expedi-

ency and not of truth because they are concerned with sterner aspects of politics and administration. But their love of expediency is bound to confine their attention to very narrow limits, so much so that its pursuit will land them before long into futility. As there is no longer any prospect of meaningful life on earth unless men are convinced that the pursuit of narrow self-interest is nothing but idiocy, it is time that politicians realized their mistake and mended their ways. Their shunning of expediency and coming over to the way of truth and love will be a distinct gain in the new endeavour of fulfilment for mankind.

Why Are You Sad and Worried, Dear Friend?

A sinner becomes sinless by associating with the holy. Once a devotee had done something wrong and was feeling very bad about it. When Swami Adbhutananda (Latu Maharaj) heard this, he called for the devotee to come and see him. He told the devotee: 'Look here, my son, just because you have made one or two mistakes, you should not give up spiritual practices and brood over your lapses and feel hopeless. To err is human. Call on God. He will give you strength to overcome weakness and destroy your delusion. He is the compassionate one. However great your sins might be, the current of His mercy will not be kept from you. How little is your sin, and yet you are so depressed! ... Do you know what Brother Vivekananda used to say? "Don't worry about a little spot of ink on the body. It is nothing. If one bathes in God's infinite ocean of mercy, the stains of a thousand inkspots will be washed away." So I am telling you, do not grieve. Pray unceasingly. Your bad tendencies will go away in a short time.'

Yet the devotee was so ashamed of his conduct that he could not raise his head. Seeing this, Latu Maharaj said: 'Before he commits sin, a man's conscience fills him with shame, yet he brushes it aside. But divine law is such that after the sin is committed, shame overwhelms him again, and he cannot raise his head in front of others.'

Even these words could not shake the devotee free from his sense of guilt. Latu Maharaj continued: 'What are you ashamed of, my son? The Lord has seen everything you have done. You cannot hide anything from Him. Since He knows all of it, why should you still be so melancholy? Instead, engage yourself in harder spiritual disciplines, keep the company of holy men, and come here now and then.' These words helped the devotee regain his mental strength, and he began to practise spiritual disciplines more vigorously.'

Swami Adbhutananda's birth anniversary falls on the Maghi Purnima day, ie, 8 February of this month.

—retold with additions from *Swami Chetananandaji's God Lived With Them*

Two Leos Speak to Us...

We publish a few thoughts of the two great Leos: Leonardo da Vinci and Count Leo Tolstoy. While Leonardo speaks about the beauty of humility, Leo Tolstoy speaks about the beauty of having an ideal. This piece was selected from an old number of Vedanta and the East.

Leonardo da Vinci says...

A certain patch of snow, finding itself clinging to the top of a rock which was perched on the extreme summit of a very high mountain, being left to its own imagination, began to reflect and say within itself: 'Shall I not be thought haughty and proud for having



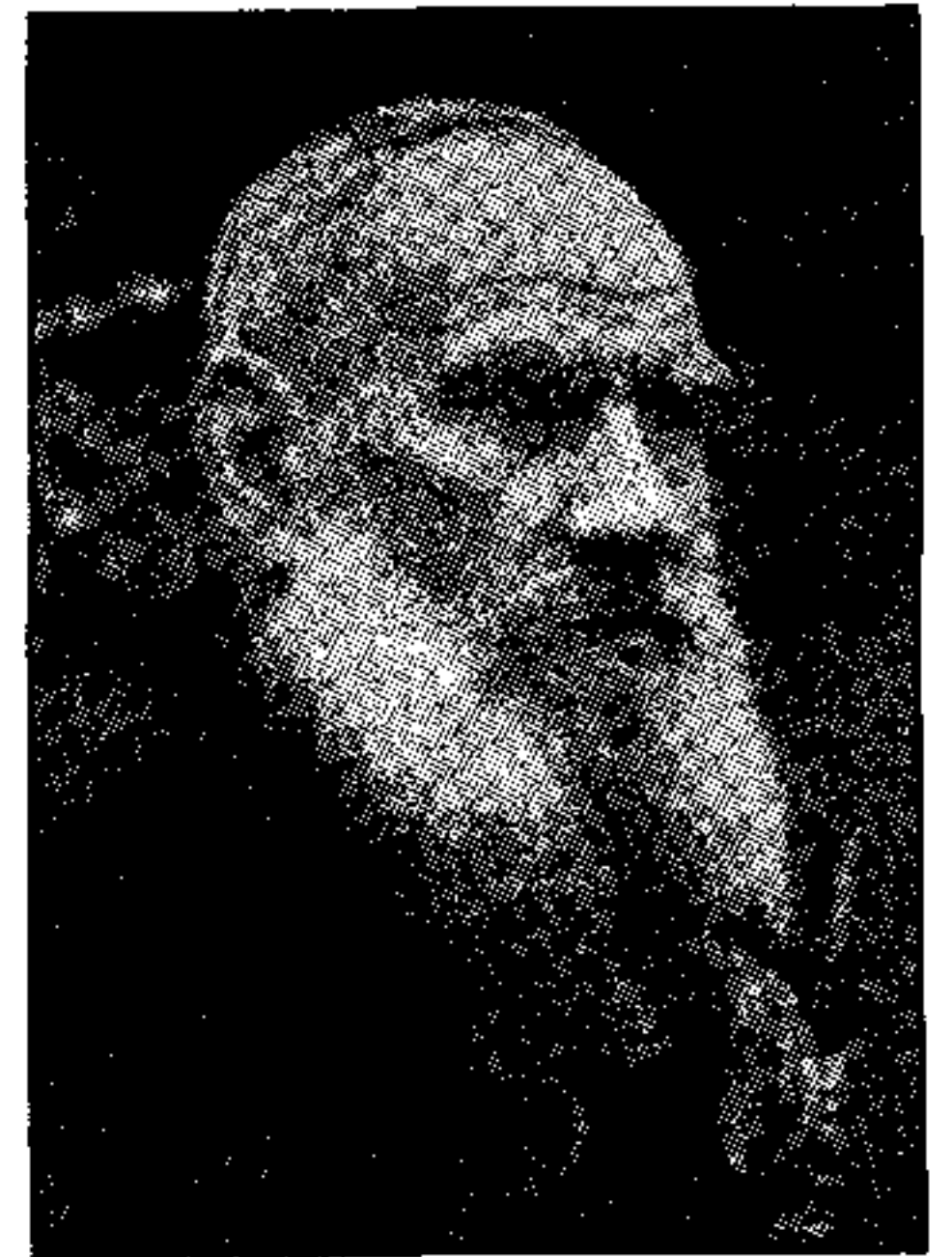
placed myself in so exalted a spot, being indeed a mere morsel of snow? And for allowing that such a vast quantity of snow as I see all around me should take a lower place than mine? Truly my small dimensions

do not deserve this eminence; and in proof of my insignificance I may readily acquaint myself with the fate which but yesterday befell my companions who in a few hours were destroyed by the sun: and this came about for their having placed themselves in a loftier station than was required of them. I will flee from the wreath of the sun, and abase myself, and find a place that befits my modest size.'

Then, throwing itself down, it began to descend, rolling down the lofty crags on to the other snow; and the more it sought a lowly place, the more it increased in bulk, until at last ending its course upon a hill it found itself almost the equal in size of the hill on which it rested, and it was the last of the snow which was melted that summer by the sun. This is said for those who by humbling themselves are exalted.

Count Leo Tolstoy says...

If I meditate as I contemplate nature, I perceive everything in nature to be in constant process of development, and each of nature's constituent portions to be unconsciously contributing towards the development of others. But man, though a like portion of nature, a portion gifted with consciousness, and therefore bound like the other portions, to make conscious use of his spiritual faculties is striving for the development of everything existent.



If I meditate as I contemplate history, I perceive the whole human race to be forever aspiring towards the same end.

If I meditate on reason, if I pass in review man's spiritual faculties, I find the soul of every man to have in it the same unconscious aspirations, the same imperative demand of the spirit.

If I meditate with an eye upon the history of philosophy, I find everywhere, and always, men to have arrived at the conclusion that the aim of human life is the universal development of humanity.

If I meditate with an eye upon theology, I find almost every nation to be cognizant of a perfect existence towards which it is the aim of mankind to aspire. □

RELIGION AND LIFE

Swami Bhuteshanandaji's Answers to Questions

The questions and answers being serialized in these columns are not meant to be scholarly expositions of various issues. People from different walks of life used to meet Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj daily during his tenure as President of the Ramakrishna Order, and discuss with him their problems and doubts; and Revered Maharaj would clear their doubts in a characteristically simple way. These questions and answers were recorded and read out to him before he approved them all for publication.

I cannot digest sane advice. Can you tell me why this is so?

We accept only that advice which is pleasing to our mind. We close our eyes to unpleasant ones. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'I have told you everything; accept it after discarding the head and tail.' However, when it comes to renunciation, he is firm: 'Nothing can be attained without renunciation,' he declared. Even if there is a little dirt in the needle, the thread cannot pass through it.

Has the dirt been inherited from past births?

Is there any account of how much has been stored in this life itself?

So many people are repeating God's names. But still there is no transformation in society. Why?

Some good work is going on. But the dirt has got accumulated for so long; will it go in a day? People think that the whole world will change for the better. Such a thing has never happened before, and will never happen in the future also. ... So many 'moulds' have been created until now. Where are those 'moulds'?

Should we follow the dictates of circumstances?

If you swim against the current, you will feel the push. Now, if the circumstance is favourable, follow it; if it is not, try to avoid it and transcend it.

What is meant by the 'Indivisible Satcidānanda'?

Let us assume that His form is indivisible. Then He is the Lord and I am His servant. Can we not become His servants if He is within us? We can worship the Formless also. If we worship the Formless, all-pervading Reality, why will there be a division between Him and us? Sri Ramakrishna has spoken about trees, fruits and flowers made of wax [cf. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 363]. He is immanent in everything and that was why Sri Ramakrishna said that He is like the salty taste that inheres in salt. You may say that strictly speaking this is not Advaita; but we are speaking about the inherent presence of God. In what way is He inherent? Like butter in milk.

Maharaj, do we not get ghee in a different stage of processing milk?

We are not concerned with that. We see He is present everywhere, like the thread being everywhere in the cloth.

I read so many religious books, I visit temples quite often; yet my mind does not become pure, why?

Dear child, you are not aware about the dirt that has accumulated in the mind. Go on scrubbing and it will become cleansed. ... It takes time.

What is the difference between sukha (happiness) and śānti (peace)?

If you like to eat rasagollas, you feel happy by eating them; but you will not attain peace. The mind does not become free from anxiety etc. When the mind becomes free from anxiety, you have attained peace.

Is there anything beyond the universe?

If the Creator is not limited to the universe, He is beyond it then. He has pervaded the universe with one part of His glory; so He is beyond the universe.

Just as people get lost in the crowd, when I lose my way in the world, what should I do?

Do not 'get lost'! Do not go astray! Hold His hand—the hand which leads you safely through, and then proceed.

My mind becomes restless just after meditating for some time. Why?

My child, you have progressed a lot then! At least you are able to meditate for some time and the mind is becoming restless after that—that meditation becomes deep. Day and night the mind dwells on worldly things and in between, you remember God once or twice: can the mind become concentrated in this way? You should think of Him always. You should open your mind and read it. You should do some self-examination.

My mind is such a small one, how can I perform self-examination?

It is certainly possible. With this small mind you thought a lot and so you got a job, became a father, and now, a grandfather too. Why can you not think and examine your mind now?

*Jānāmi dharmam na ca me pravṛttiḥ;
jānāmyadharmaṁ na ca me nivṛttiḥ.*

'I know what is *dharmā* but have no inclination to follow it; I know what is *adharma* but have no inclination to give it up.'

Your point is, 'O Hari! Repeat Your name Yourself. What can we poor people do?'

Suppose we say, 'Your path is this one,' you will say, 'You must take us along the path.' If we ask, 'Why do you not come here?' you will instantly say, 'You should bring us here.' That is, 'We shall not do anything at all'!

Maharaj, whenever I can get some time I run to your presence. I do not know if I have the ability to do anything myself. This coming here will not go in vain, I hope?

Why will this 'running here' go in vain? But you will also have to prepare yourself. If you run here just out of curiosity, and spend your time in talking, it will not be keeping true holy company. Why should holy company become futile? 'Holy company' means the company of God and we should be conscious of that company. Or else, it is not holy company.

Some are ordained by God to go downwards, while some upwards. Does this depend upon the potential of the souls so ordained?

No, it doesn't. It is according to His sweet will. ... No, not depending upon the potential of the souls ... This is because, who has created the 'potential' souls? Even the 'potentials' are His own creation.

Yam kāmāye taṁ tamugraṁ kṛṇomi

taṁ brahmāṇaṁ taṁ ṛṣiṁ taṁ sumedhām.

—Caṇḍī: 'Devī Sūktam', 5

The Divine Mother says: 'I make a dear creature great, a brahmā, a sage, and one with supremely divine intelligence.'

Maharaj, are all things on this earth dependent upon experience (anubhūti) alone?

You see, all experiences or *anubhūti*s cannot be true. There is consistency in truth. Truth can never be a chameleon. What is light can never be darkness.

—Compiled by Smt Manju Nandi Mazumdar

Adequate Drinking Water for Villages

SAMIR KUMAR RAY

Swami Vivekananda's heart bled for the poor villagers of India. The condition of Indian villages is not better now, though much has been done. Many villages don't even have drinking water! In this excellent article, Sri Samir Kumar Ray presents ideas about how to provide adequate clean water to villages. Sri Ray has worked on numerous vital water-related projects for decades, and is presently the managing director of a private consultancy in Calcutta.

The plight of our rural population due to the non-availability of adequate drinking water during the dry months is well known. Owing to this, the misery—enteric diseases, and deaths of both animals and human beings—and large-scale migrations have become a regular feature. The sufferings Indian village women have to undergo in collecting drinking water day after day are well publicized and well documented; but, unfortunately, nothing tangible has been done during the last fifty years to provide safe and dependable supply of drinking water to villages.

To work out a low-cost dependable solution to this drinking water problem, the first question naturally deals with the arithmetic of water balance. We must ascertain how much water is needed and how much water can be made available easily and economically. It may be interesting to note that about 80% of water-precipitation in our country generally takes place during approximately 100 days in the monsoon months, and we are unable to utilize at least 35/40 percent of it due to inadequate and inefficient storage facilities. It should, therefore, be possible to provide for drinking water supplies in villages throughout the year, which normally will not be more than the usable amount of unutilized precipitation. The problem is acute in parts of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, where the amount of annual precipitation is mostly lost due to evaporation and seepage. This results in surface storage reservoirs getting dry within 3 or 4 months

after the rains, leaving the villages without any water source during the dry months.

The problem is to develop perennial drinking water reserve successfully in villages. Obviously, the solution lies in creating suitable underground reservoirs, which can hold sufficient rain water required over a year for a village after allowing for losses. Normal surface reservoirs like ponds, ditches, etc, are not suitable due to high evaporation and seepage losses, which, in fact, can be as high as the total annual precipitation!

Let us now make a theoretical case study of a typical village in Jaisalmer district of Rajasthan, which is one of the worst drought-prone areas in India.

Area of the village: 30 Hectares

Estimated population: 150

Per capita land area: 0.33 acres

Estimated head of cattle: 150

Drinking-water requirement: (a) human beings: 20 litres/person, ie, 3,000 litres per day; (b) Cattle: 100 litres/head, ie, 15,000 litres per day.

Total water requirement: 18,000 litres per day.

Annual water requirement: 6.5 million litres.

Annual rainfall (75% dependable): 150 mm

Total annual rainfall on 30 hectares: 45,000 million litres

Water available even after 75% runoff losses: 11.25 million litres.

We, therefore, have a margin of about five million litres to allow for seepage and evaporation losses. However, while we can prevent the seepage losses to a great extent by providing a proper lining on the reservoir sur-

faces, the annual evaporation loss alone will amount to the same as the total precipitation. It is evident, therefore, that conventional surface reservoirs will not work.

The solution lies in creating confined underground artificial aquifers of sufficient capacity, annually recharged with rain water, to cater to the drinking-water needs of the village throughout the year. A concrete reservoir will not be suitable due to the prohibitive cost. A reservoir dug out in the soil at a suitable elevation and location, where the rain water can easily flow without much run off losses by properly grading and treating the catchment, will be most suitable. To facilitate maximum recharge, the reservoir should be narrow and shaped like a channel, covering the maximum extent of the catchment as far as possible. To make it an underground aquifer, it must be filled up with sand available locally. If we consider an average of 30% void ratio of sand after consolidation over the year, the total volume of the confined aquifer needed to hold the usable annual available precipitation would be 37,500 million litres. Assuming that the specific yield co-efficient to be 0.2, the annual yield from the aquifer will be 7,500 million litres, which is satisfactory, considering the requirement of 6,500 million litres. With a practicable depth of 2 m, the area required would be approximately $18,750 \text{ m}^2$, or approximately 2 hectares. The required storage area will not be difficult to locate, since in every village there will probably be derelict channels, ditches or ponds available. A proper contour survey will have to be made to identify the catchment area. Soil borings will also be necessary to obtain the underground soil profile. Daily rainfall data, sunshine hours and cloud cover for at least 25 years shall be obtained from the nearest meteorological station to estimate the (75% dependable) rainfall.

Reservoirs can be made by re-excavating the derelict channels, existing ponds or ditches which can then be filled up with local sand after properly lining the bottom and sides of the reservoir to prevent seepage losses. The

top one metre and the periphery are to be filled up with the excavated soil to keep the evaporation loss to a minimum. Sufficient openings on the top surface to act as water collectors are to be provided for rain water to recharge into the aquifer below. It may be interesting to note that a dependable rainfall of 150 mm annually on the reservoir area will fill up the reservoir to the extent of about 20%. The remaining 80% will have to be collected from the catchment either by gravity or pumping, as the case may be. However, for this some innovative collecting arrangement may have to be developed. The recharging water will trickle down to the underground aquifer through the sand collectors kept on the top soil. Most of the soil and silt will be arrested in the collectors, which can be cleaned annually. The cost of such an underground reservoir can't be more than Rs 15 lakhs per hectare or Rs.450 for every 1000 litres of stored water if carried out under the Food for Work programme and some *shrama-dān*. Bottom-sealed large diameter brick wells will also be able to hold the required quantity of water. But this may be costly.

From the confined aquifer, the accumulated water can flow in a controlled manner, suitable to the daily requirement, into a chamber wherefrom it can be bailed or pumped out by villagers by hand pumps or pails. Water-level indicators are to be provided for regular assessment of the water availability.

The accumulated water can be disinfected by suitable periodic injections of chlorine through the sand collectors from the surface. The area used for the reservoir can also be gainfully utilised for vegetable farming and social forestry on the surface top soil and surrounding areas, the income from which could be used to meet with the expenses for the maintenance of the aquifer.

Progressively successful block-level water supply schemes can be developed, based on this concept, and integrated into a network of reservoirs for dependable piped water supply system for the region, paving the way for rural sanitation system. □

Meditations on Madhu Vidyā

SWAMI SHRADDHANANDA

These Meditations were transcribed from class talks given by Swami Shraddhanandaji Maharaj at the Vedanta Society of Sacramento from the 1970's through the 1990's to a group of students. The Swamiji was minister-in-charge of the Vedanta Society of Sacramento, California, and passed on in 1996. These meditations were recorded, transcribed, and sent to us by ARCHANA (MARY ANNA TAMAZ). We thank Archana for this excellent presentation to our readers. We shall publish one meditation each month.

INTRODUCTION

We shall have discourses on some select portions of the *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*. This is the largest of the Upaniṣads. The word *brhad* means 'big', so the name. *Aranyaka* means the wisdom that was taught in the forests. This Upaniṣad has four parts and each part has several chapters. The chapter we shall take up is the fifth chapter of the second part, and the name of this chapter is *madhu vidyā*, the meditation on honey. *Madhu* means honey. Honey stands for joy, friendship, sweetness. So this chapter is 'The contemplation of honey'.

The idea of this chapter on *madhu vidyā* is that there is a bond of unity between the universe, nature and man. That bond is *madhu*, joy. The Upaniṣad first points out some common experiences which we cannot deny. But in order to understand them, we have to observe and think. The Upaniṣad begins with the earth. It studies the different facets of nature: earth, sun, moon, waters, clouds, lightening, and then the moral order, truth, justice. All things are within the range of our experience. We all know about them to some extent, but what we don't is their spiritual depths. That is what the Upaniṣad teaches.

So this Upaniṣad gives us the knowledge of those things which are not available in other sources—in science and astronomy, in biology or zoology, in economics or statistics. This knowledge is called spiritual knowledge. This spiritual knowledge also came from study,

meditation and direct experience. So we must have faith in this knowledge just as we have faith in physics, chemistry, etc. Though its methods are different, this knowledge has sprung out of experience and so it is a deep knowledge. We should have faith initially. Only then shall we be able to understand and appreciate its relevance; and as we go deeper, we shall see that we are talking about something that is very close to us—our own truth, the truth of the Self.

THE FIRST MANTRA

इयं पृथिवी सर्वेषां भूतानां मधु, अस्यै
पृथिव्यै सर्वाणि भूतानि मधु; यश्चायमस्यां
पृथिव्यां तेजोमयोऽमृतमयः पुरुषः,
यश्चायमध्यात्मं शरीरस्तेजोमयोऽमृतमयः
पुरुषः अयमेव स योऽयमात्मा ; इदममृतम्,
इदं ब्रह्म, इदं सर्वम् ॥५.२.१॥

This earth is honey for all beings, and all beings are honey for this earth. The intelligent, immortal being, the soul of this earth, and the intelligent, immortal being, the soul in the individual being—each is honey to the other. Brahman is the soul in each; he indeed is the Self in all. He is all.

This earth is honey to all beings. Here by 'all beings' every living being that is on this earth is meant and not merely human beings. But let us not include plants and trees here,

though it is true that this earth is honey to all beings, including plants and trees. Plants and trees have more claim on Mother Earth than us. They directly get their nutrition from Mother Earth.

So the earth is honey to all living beings. That is, the earth is a source of nourishment and joy and harmony and strength to all beings. That is called *madhu*. This earth is *madhu*, honey, to all living beings.

And conversely, **all beings are honey for this earth.** There is a relation. Mother Earth not only gives but also receives. Mother Earth is happy that on her lap all these beings are functioning. They are being born, they are being nourished, they are getting strength, they are enjoying, and they are also dying. But as some beings are dying, they are replaced by others. There is no vacuum. On party of dancers is coming on the stage; and after their dance is over, they go back, and another party comes. And Mother Earth is enjoying that. So all beings are honey to her. All beings are a source of joy to Mother Earth. She is mother to all human beings. They may be poor or rich, they may be learned or ignorant, they may be strong or weak but that doesn't matter.

This Mother Earth is mother to all beings. Human beings can say out of vanity, 'We are privileged.' But it isn't exactly so. If you see animal books and television programmes about the life, habitat, etc, of animals in the African jungles, you can see what a variety of animals there are. Endless varieties and species—big and small animals, insects, birds—and all living beings are children of Mother Earth.

There is no food in the sky. The birds may fly far above, but they have to come to Mother Earth for food. The tiny insects have to depend on Mother Earth. And Mother Earth is not partial. She does not say, 'I shall give food and nourishment only to human beings, or only to elephants and tigers and pythons.' Mother Earth says, 'No, I am the mother of every living being. They are honey to me! The human being, the tiger, the elephant, all are honey to me!

I am honey to them. And they are honey to me.' That is the voice of honey. All living beings depend on Mother Earth and she also depends on them. How is the Mother Earth depending on them? Consider the case of a human mother: a woman's life is vacant if a child does not come. A married woman may have plenty, but her life is empty because she wants someone to call her 'mother'. So also Mother Earth has a craving for living beings. All living beings are, therefore, honey to the Earth. We think that if we can use up Mother Earth, the story ends. But Mother Earth also has a mother's heart. Poets sometimes tell us about this, but the Upanishads assure us that this is true. It is more true when you come to spiritual life. The next line will tell us that.

The intelligent, immortal being, the soul of this earth, and the intelligent, immortal being, the soul in the individual being—each is honey to the other. Don't think that Mother Earth is just made up of rocks and earth and water. The Mother Earth has a soul and an individuality. To explain this, let's take the case of the human being. The human body has different organs. The individual structure is called the microcosm while the external nature is called macrocosm. The gross body corresponds to the earth. There is another part corresponding to the Sun, and so on. There's a relation between the cosmic parts and the individual parts—there's a harmony, and that is *madhu*. Just as the physical body has a soul and an individuality, Mother Earth has a soul and an individuality too. The universal soul of Mother Earth and the individual soul within the body are honey to each other. So, in our contemplation, we have to think of the soul of Mother Earth. Then the contemplation comes that Mother Earth's soul and our soul are honey to one another. We then try to feel a relation of mutual friendship, love, harmony and peace between our soul and the soul of the earth.

There are four things, then. On the physical side this vast earth and all the living beings are honey to each other. Everyone has to know

this, about how they are mutually complementary. The other part, that we should practise this meditation, is also true. Through contemplation we shall be able to feel the soul of this earth. The universe is material from one standpoint, but as we proceed in our adventure into the spiritual reality, we have to change the mode of our thinking. So these contemplations have been presented. We should try to find that unity through meditation. The more we can comprehend the unity behind the manifold phenomena, the more shall we approach the Truth. That Truth is Brahman, the spiritual Reality. Therefore, we shall have to contemplate on the truth of the earth, the living beings, the soul of the earth and the soul of one living being as being honey to another. This brings us to the next sentence of the first mantra.

Now the next line: **Brahman is the soul in each; he indeed is the Self in all. He is all.** The four we saw above are in reality the Self. As we progress in our knowledge and understanding we shall see that this Self-knowledge is the means of immortality. Most living beings—tigers, elephants, etc—though big in power and appearance, can't attain self-knowledge. They have to wait for a human birth. They are fulfilling their karma. It is karma which gives the soul the body of a cobra or a python or an ant. As a result of some karma one is born either as an elephant or some other animal. But in that body, nothing is done to evolve. We envy the lower animals and sometimes feel it is wonderful to be born as either a tiger or some other beast. But the greatest birth is that of the human being. It is karma, therefore, that is sending us to these different levels of reality. This wheel is called the wheel of creation; everybody is rotating in this wheel. It is a wonderful play going on, a wonderful performance, and the master of the performance is also wonderful. Who is that master? He is God. God is a wonderful sculptor, mathematician, poet. These ideas are there in the Upaniṣads. The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*

calls it *brahma-cakra*, the wheel of creation. It is Brahman who pushes this wheel of creation.

When it comes to human beings, we have the ability to question. We want to get out of this wheel of transmigration. Is there a way out? That is the spiritual question. The Upaniṣads say that there is a way out. When you go deeper and deeper into the reality, you will find out what this *brahma-cakra* is, and what its revolution is. Eventually you will find that there is no revolution at all. There is no rotation at all. There is no birth and death and no transmigration. To know this, you should reach the Truth, which is the Self, Brahman. When you touch that Reality, you rise above all duality. You get out of whatever is. Mundane things may be important at certain levels of life, but at another level, you have a glimpse of the Real, the Great. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* calls it 'Great', *bhūma*.

The Upaniṣadic contemplations are given only to help us attain that supreme knowledge. The sage says that we should think of this earth and all the living beings. Then we should switch over to a higher dimension—to the soul of the earth and the living beings. In our own selves there is the centre and this centre and the centre of the earth are related. There is a relation of joy and love. This is to be meditated upon.

What will this meditation lead to? The Upaniṣad says: 'It is Brahman.' This meditation will lead us to the unity with Brahman, which is also our true Self. What we call earth and living beings are in truth Brahman alone. It is the Self that is manifesting as the manifold universe. But we should reach the truth by progressing step by step. And that is what this chapter teaches. In our contemplation, therefore, we should initially think of the earth, the living beings, then the soul of the earth and the soul of the individual. In this manner, higher experiences come of themselves. This is the first mantra of *madhu vidyā*. We shall study the next mantra next month.

(Next Month: The Second Meditation)

Strength

Here is a hermit's amazing story. Martinianus was the hermit's name. He lived near Athens and died there. Butler's *Lives of the Saints* gives some information about him.

Martinianus was barely nine years old when he left home in Cesarea, Palestine, eager to know God. How the lad wandered away from Cesarea, went to the desert, found a solitary cell at the foot of a hill, and lived there for twenty long years, are all subjects for adventure-story writers. He struggled so long to see God. But God wasn't cruel to him: numerous were the graces He had showered on His dear child. Twenty years had gone by in this way when the following incident occurred one night. That cold night was to be a terrible one for him.

It was late evening when Martinianus heard a voice from outside his cell. Who could have come to this desert at such a dark, chilly night, wondered Martinianus. The voice came again, and he understood that it was a woman's voice. And that woman, whoever it was, was calling him! It had been the strict rule of hermits not to entertain any woman. Now, here she was, a woman at night, calling for help. Martinianus went out and, with bowed head, enquired: 'Who are you at this late hour?' 'What shall I say about my terrible misfortune, O Saint! I shall die! I shall die!' cried the woman. 'I have unwittingly strayed away into the desert. I am scared. I am lonely. I am a poor woman, as you can see from the rags that I wear. Won't you save me, O Saint?' She sobbed. The wail was terrible for the compassionate ears of Martinianus. He had no other way but say, 'You may come inside and stay in this cell. I shall manage to stay elsewhere.'

The woman in rags readily entered the cell. And even as Martinianus was ready to go out, she said, 'O Saint! O Saint! Will you go away, leaving the lonely, terrified woman in this cell?' But Martinianus was firm, and so he was about to walk away. At that moment, something strange happened. The lady, whoever she was, threw away her rags and she stood attired in the best robes of a rich woman of the city! She said, 'O Martinianus! I have heard about you. I am a rich lady from Cesarea. My name is Zoe. I have surrendered to you. What will you do by leading such a lonely life? Come back to the city when you are still in your youth. Enough of this hermit's life. I surrender myself to you.'

Martinianus was completely shell-shocked! The Lord was testing him then. The wicked woman of the city, Zoe, unable to control her wickedness, had come here to disturb him. And he, out of compassion and utter foolishness, had allowed her into the cell. He was undone! Martinianus shuddered for a moment. But where will all the austerities done for two decades go? Where will all the repetitions of the Lord's names for so long go? They all came to his rescue.

Even before Zoe could utter another word, Martinianus said: 'O compassionate lady! I shall return soon.' And he walked out. Behind the cell was a fire, which he had lit to cook his food. It was almost getting extinguished when he went there like a shot, added a few pieces of wood, sat on a stone and thrust both his feet into the fire. It took moments for the pain to overpower him. Martinianus managed for some time, but when the pain became unbearable, he shouted. That brought Zoe, who was waiting for him in his cell, to come out. She was shocked for some moments, and

when she saw and understood what was going on, she came to her senses. The lady really shook with fear now. She swooned. When she awoke, she wept bitterly. Martinianus remarked: 'Ah! See my fate! I'm unable to bear this small pain, and how can I bear the pain of hell?' Though tears were rolling down Martinianus's cheeks, he controlled himself. The smell of burning flesh and the sight of the burning were all unbearable for Zoe. 'Pardon me! Please pardon me, a sinner! O holy Martinianus, you've proved your sainthood. I am wicked! I am a sinner! Please save me! I beg you, please remove your holy feet from fire. '

Martinianus placed his feet slowly on the earth. Zoe was lying near his feet, seeking pardon repeatedly. Martinianus said, 'O lady! You have understood the worth of human life now. Seek God, and you shall be pardoned of all sins. You have repented. Now, give up your old habits and transform yourself.'

Zoe wailed as she said, 'O holy father! Whatever will happen to me now? I am such a sinner, and my past has been so bad. ... I shall abide by whatever you bid me to. ... Please save me!'

Martinianus said: 'If you are ready to change the course of your life, give up everything, and walk over to the St Paula monastery in Bethlehem. There will you have the greatest treasure of love, God, waiting to save your soul. Pray all your life and be a blessing unto others.'

Zoe got up. She had found a new light. In attempting to bring down a saint to worldliness, she had found a way to holiness. She said with determination: 'I shall somehow manage to go over to Bethlehem. Lord bless you, O holy father, for treating me so kindly. I pray fervently for your holy feet to heal soon. Take care. ...' She left. Zoe was admitted to St Paula's, and there she led an exemplary life. Her penances stunned the other nuns, and everyone was inspired by her life.

Cold weather is perhaps beneficial for healing wounds. Martinianus's wounds took

some 5/6 months to heal completely. All the while, he punished himself for having admitted Zoe into his cell. He was only waiting for the wounds to heal. Once they did, he walked away from his cell of twenty years.

This time, Martinianus was headed towards the sea. The sea? Yes, it was to an island that he went. The island was nothing but a huge rock, surrounded by water. He lived there, exposed to sun and rain, all alone. One has to eat something to live. Providence arranged for a pious boatman, who would often bring a substantial quantity of biscuits and water for him. The boatman also brought him material for weaving baskets. And he would take the baskets to sell in the market. Thus Martinianus lived for many years, contemplating the glory of God in diverse ways.

This world is indeed a wonderful place to live in. No one can live in peace here. Even as Martinianus was happily engaged on God, there was a severe test once again. One day there was a storm. A small vessel was passing by and it struck the rock-island of Martinianus. The vessel broke and everyone perished. Only a girl was saved because she held on to a plank. Martinianus was the helpless witness of the entire episode. The girl panted for life and wept bitterly. She cried, 'Help! Help!'

How could Martinianus remain without helping her? He somehow managed to climb down the rock, swam to her, and saved her. He took her to his rock-island. Once she was safe, he showed the biscuits and other items he had, told her of the boatman who was to come in a few days, and jumped into the ocean. Even before the girl could understand what was happening, Martinianus was there in the ocean, fighting the waves bravely. He managed to swim over to some strange land, and from there, began his unending walk. He had found no place safe for him. And so he walked and walked.

Martinianus was fifty years old when he died somewhere near Athens, they say. Thus ended the glorious life of a saint. □

BOOK REVIEWS

WHAT LIFE HAS TAUGHT ME: By Swami Ranganathanandaji. Published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Kulapati Munshi Marg, Mumbai 400 007. 1999. Pages: vii+38. Price: Rs.30.

This monograph is the twentieth in a series of booklets on eternal values published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. In this booklet, Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj pens down some reminiscences from his long and illustrious career. We find how even in his early life he was quick to learn the imperative for *vāk śuddhi* from his mother; he was in love of adventure and realized the importance of or need to 'live dangerously' if one has to be of any service to the rest of the community; and how he was led to the study of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda literature, and the impact of the latter on him. Though the author narrates only selected incidents from his missionary life in this book, they serve as pointers to the readers and more so to the youth for thought and practice, than as 'lessons' learned by him. In particular, his advise to the nation's youth that they should seek to be 'praiseworthy' and not just seek 'praise', and to the elite public to rise above the 'urge to be content with the three "P"s' should receive the required attention from the respective sections of the public. His reference to the inefficacy of communist doctrines and atheistic philosophies for humanity's progress and welfare, and the need for the Judeo-Christian West to learn the real import of Vedanta or Indian spirituality, are matters the rationalists and the intelligentsia should give serious thought to. The author's remarks in conclusion, also highlighted by the publisher in the Preface, namely, 'If national maladies exist, our nation has effective remedies,' is the essential and inspiring message he has for the readers.

Though the booklet is titled 'What Life has Taught Me,' it is more a collection of reminiscences or gleanings from Swamiji's long and illustrious spiritual life. It is bound to teach a lot to everyone who reads it. The printers have done a good job and the book is moderately priced. It is a valuable addition to the personal collection specially of those in the teaching profession, and is a must in all libraries.

Major H. Subramanian
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THE GENETS: A LEGACY OF DEDICATION: By Swami Tathagatananda. Published by the Vedanta Society of New York, 34 West 71st Street, New York 10023. Pages: 34. Price not mentioned.

'All these years the Vedanta movement has been supported mainly by the life-giving and life-sacrificing devotion of American women. The Genets are among these legendary women,' says Swami Tathagatanandaji, introducing the remarkable family. This is a remarkable chapter of western Vedanta. Much before gender issues were explored, these women quietly initiated nothing short of an alternate current of women's spirituality as an antidote to the excesses implicit in such movements.

Born in a well-to-do French-Canadian family, Jeanne and Rolande together with their mother would never dream that they would form a nucleus of the Vedanta Centre in the cultural capital, New York. By nature the one was given to music and the other dancing. But both found fulfilment of their ideals in Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta. The divine beings, the holy trinity, found unswerving loyalty to their ideals in the two sisters and as the revered Swami says, 'the worth of the Genet family is forever recorded in time by their lives of devotion, self-denial, self-forgetfulness, courage, fortitude and dedication in their myriad duties and responsibilities, cheerfully assumed and performed.'

It is a symbol of their total dedication that, though affluent, they chose to live in the basement of the New York Society in those heroic days of early Vedanta in the United States. Meticulous in their concern for the day-to-day affairs of the developing New York Society, they drew their inspiration from Ramakrishna, 'a peaceful sailor in a stormy sea, ...a vessel of sacred perfume in their heart.' In fact, expositors of popular Vedanta will certainly find it difficult to stick to exposition if they catch even a glimpse of the impeccable spirituality manifest in every act of these two sisters. The manner in which they assisted the pioneer swamis like Revered Bodhananda and Pavitrananda is exemplification of balancing personal loyalties and impersonal ideals.

This is a saga of 'dedicated love in action' that will well be a well of inspiration, which will produce good music only when properly tuned.' The enormous range of this tuning is evident when we

learn that Jeanne 'looked upon the building of the society as the body of Swamiji.' Thus, though a slender book, this is manifestly a significant chapter in the evolution of western Vedanta and the role women play in it. The revered Swami's book is an invaluable addition to the existing literature of this nature.

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LEARN TO LIVE (Volumes One and Two): By Swami Jagadatmananda. Translated by Dr N. Thirumaleshwar Bhat. Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, 16, Ramakrishna Math Road, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004. 2000. Pages: Volume One-256; Volume Two-415. Price: Vol. 1-Rs. 40. Vol. 2-Rs. 60.

In the October 2000 number of *Prabuddha Bharata* we reviewed an important work: *Gospel of The Life Sublime*, Volume 1, by Swami Jagadatmanandaji Maharaj. We had expressed the hope that the second volume of that book would come out soon. And now it has come out. The Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, has done a great service to humanity by bringing out the two volumes with a new name: *Learn to Live*. This work was originally published in Kannada and was received with immense enthusiasm by the people of Karnataka. The target-readers were especially the young, and the book has been immensely successful in reaching noble ideas down to the youth. It has helped innumerable youth to lead wonderful lives. Many lives have been transformed. It also became a university text book. Both young and old found this book tremendously interesting and inspiring. There was perhaps no such book, aimed at bringing help to everyone, in such a simple and absorbing style. So the book sold like hotcakes. Then began the persistent demand for its translation into other languages. Dr Thirumaleshwar Bhat has done a wonderful job in beautifully translating the book into English. Using short, simple inspiring anecdotes and stories, Swami Jagadatmanandaji tells us how to have faith in ourselves, how to give up worrying and lead meaningful lives, how to serve others selflessly, and how such selfless actions benefit us. He also tells us what karma is, why it is necessary in moulding our lives, what the power of selfless love for everyone is, what the power of prayer is, etc. The art of living is in leading meaningful and purposeful lives. Otherwise, where's the difference between animals and

us? The purpose of life is to realize God, and that should be our sole end and aim. The young should be taught about this truth in a convincing manner. They should be taught the art of bringing out their best by encouraging them to have immense faith in their potentialities. Again, since most people lead householders' lives and have to be busy with their day-to-day activities, they cannot give their lives entirely to seeking God. They also have to face numerous problems in life. Facing many difficulties of life, they lose hope and faith in God. *Learn to Live* assures all such people that they should never lose faith. It also tells them how to progress along the path of the Divine.

Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, has brought out the books in an elegant manner but priced them very low: the two volumes cost only Rs. 100! We hope everyone will read these volumes and benefit from them.

The Editor
Prabuddha Bharata

SAMAN SUTTAM: Compiled by Sri Jinendra Varni. Edited by Prof Sagarmal Jain. Translated by Justice T.K. Tukol & Dr K.K. Dixit. Published by Bhawan Mahavir Memorial Samiti, Bhagawan Mahavir Kendra (Near South Campus, Delhi University), Benito Juarez Road, New Delhi 110021. 1999. Pages: xxiii+292. Price: Rs. 100 (Bound); Rs. 80 (Paperback).

Just as Acharya Vinobaji had brought out the essence of all the religions and their religious works such as *The Essence of Christianity*, *Nava Samhitā of Dhammapada*, etc, he wanted the *Jaina Dharmaśāra* also to be published. There was a practical problem because it is a living religion and its two major sects, the Digambaras and the Śvetāmbaras, and also the sub-sects (Sthānakavāsi, Terāpanthi, Tāraṇapanthi), had doctrinal differences which were not easy to reconcile. Sri Jinendra Varniji, however, took up the challenge and presented a compilation from the relevant texts to an assembly of Jaina ācāryas and monks, scholars and laymen—representing all the Jaina sects—in Delhi on 29-30 November 1974. In that assembly it was given the name *Saman Suttam*, and its first edition with Hindi translation was published in April 1975, to coincide with the 2,500th anniversary celebrations of Mahāvīrā's *nirvāṇa* (reckoned from 15 October 527 BC). Sri Radha Krishna Bajaj of the Sarva Seva Sangha (the sponsor of the project under the inspiration of Sant Vinobaji) has rightly noted that 'during the course of the last two thousand years, it was for the first time that an

unanimous work was published... ' Its translation into English could, however, only be published in 1993 (first edition) because extra care had to be taken in the translation to avoid contradictions.

The draft was sent to Vinobaji with the signatures of several great munis as well as the compiler. Vinobaji said: 'There have been many events of satisfaction in my life. Perhaps, the best of the satisfactions, the final one, comes to me at last this year. I had often requested the Jainas that the essence of Jaina philosophy should be available in the same manner as that of the Vedic religion which was available in the *Gītā* in about 700 verses and that of Buddhism in the *Dhammapada*. This was a difficult task for the Jainas, as they have many traditions and many books. ... Finally ... a book entitled *Saman Suttam* ... took its shape. There are 756 verses. The figure 'seven' is very auspicious for the Jainas. If 7 and 108 are multiplied, the result is 756. So many verses were selected by unanimous consent. ...'

Justice Tukol and Dr Dixit, the translators, have succinctly put in their learned Introduction that Jainism follows the tradition of Śramaṇa culture, which believes in the existence of the soul but not of God as a creator of the universe. The soul has an eternal existence and is self-regulated; it reaches the highest position through independent progress, after attainment of supreme purification by destruction of attachment or indulgence and hatred, and acquisition of complete detachment. They also note that though history has not been able to trace the origin of the Jaina religion, the historical evidence now available and the result of dispassionate researches in literature have established that Jainism is undoubtedly an ancient religion; and also that Tirthaṅkara Mahāvīra is not its founder but he merely reiterated and rejuvenated the religion preached by the preceding Tirthaṅkaras, beginning with Ṛṣabhadeva and continuing through Pārśvanātha to Mahāvīra.

Ahiṃsā and *anekānta* form the bedrock of Jaina ethics. Commission of violence or non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) is dependent upon the mental condition of the doer, not on the act. If there is violence in one's mental state, the person would be ethically violent even if no violence is actually committed. The realization that even the highest knowledge that can be acquired by an embodied soul in this vast world is limited, imperfect, and one-sided, and that the ego of the individual and the inadequacy of language or expression also create conflicts and disputes, one should possess an attitude of *anekānta* or looking at from many points of view. Fruitful result can be obtained when the practice of truth that is known and the knowledge of truth that is practised are combined together.

The most significant contribution of the Jaina philosophy is that every object or substance, whether it possesses consciousness or is immobile,

behaves according to its own nature (*dharma*); and the existence eternal of six substances (*jīva, pudgala, dharma, adharma, ākāśa and kāla*), proves that this world is without a beginning and without an end. It laid stress on *karma* (action, conduct) as against *janma* (birth) for determining whether a person was a brahmin or any other, and put a premium on the observance of the ethical code by asserting that tradition, apparel, money, strength, power, knowledge or books cannot protect a person from the effect of one's *karma*. The entire ethical discipline of Jainism is self-oriented, and a systematic and gradually progressive prescription of ethical codes capable of leading upwards is available.

In the *Saman Suttam* are compiled in an orderly and concise manner, leaving out the controversial, the essential principles of Jaina religion and philosophy, in 756 verses drawn from the accepted textual lore in Prakrit which is said to have come down by tradition from the last Tirthaṅkara, Lord Mahāvīra. It is divided into four parts: *vyotirmukha*, or the source of illumination; *mokṣa-mārga* or the path of liberation; *tattva-darśana* or metaphysics, and *syādvāda* or the theory of relativity. The first part contains 191 verses under 15 heads and includes precepts on transmigratory cycle, karma, religion, self-restraint, non-possessiveness, non-violence, and soul, inter alia. The second part is the longest, with 396 verses under 18 heads: *mokṣa* or liberation from the cycle of birth and death is the ultimate aim to be attained, and this part, therefore, contains the precepts on different aspects of spiritual discipline. The third part has only 72 verses under three heads, dealing with the fundamentals, the substances and the universe. The fourth part concludes with 97 verses under 8 heads, dealing with the categories of knowledge; under the conclusion head, it has been stated (v. 745): 'Thus preached the *Vaiśālīka* Bhagavān Mahāvīra, of the *jñāta* clan, endowed with supreme knowledge and supreme vision. This is what I speak about,' to bear the authenticity of all that has been compiled in this compendium and to endow it with the sanctity of a scriptural text; and the text closes with a 7-verse hymn dedicated to Mahāvīra. At the end is the alphabetic index of the verses. The verses are given in the Nāgarī script with transliteration in Roman below and translation into English in chaste prose on the opposite page.

Saman Suttam is a commendable work for making the principles and precepts of Jainism available in a nutshell to the English-knowing people. Technical terminology is not always easy to be rendered into English because it has a Semitic philosophic base, and that difficulty is also experienced with translating the works pertaining to other Indian philosophical systems. For instance, the concept of Atman is foreign to the westerner, and soul does not convey the whole sense. It would have been

useful if the original sources of the compiled verses were also indicated in an appendix. Of the signatories to the original text, Muni Vidyanandji is fortunately still with us and a request can be addressed to him about this. All the same, the compiler and the counselling teachers, translators and publishers deserve commendation for bringing out this book and making available the essence of Jainism in a succinct form to the inquisitive, as was intended by Vinobaji.

Dr Shashi Kant

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President, JyotiPrasad Jain Trust, Lucknow*

INTRODUCING BOOKS

YOUR AURA & YOUR CHAKRAS—The Owner's Manual: By Karla McLaren. Published by Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt Ltd, 41 UA, Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110 007. 2000. Pages: XII+291. Price: Rs. 150.

Ancient Indian ideas and ideals coming back to us in western garb! The blurb says: '*Your Aura & Your Chakras* is a comprehensive text about the restoration and maintenance of the subtle energy system. Karla McLaren, who has worked with survivors of abuse and trauma, shows how to clear the chakras of old hurts and to cleanse and strengthen the aura for protection against invasive energy. ... Learning how to redirect your emotions through McLaren's simple meditations can benefit your life, bringing a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment. ... Your body and your emotions hold more healing power than any outside force ever will and by respecting your inner needs you can create a flowing link between body and spirit.'

THE ABC'S OF CHAKRA THERAPY—A Workbook. By Deedra Diemer. Published by Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt Ltd, New Delhi 110 007. 2000. Pages: viii + 174. Price: Rs. 125.

The blurb announces: '*The ABC's of Chakra Therapy* is a practical, user-friendly guidebook that leads you on a journey of self-healing and transformation by exploring your energy field—specifically the seven main energy centres, or chakras. Deedre Diemer's unique approach draws on a variety of therapies—visualization, sound, colour, aro-

matherapy, reflexology, crystals and gemstones, along with yoga and other physical exercises. She combines facets of these powerful healing techniques so you can clear energy blocks and open to healing on all levels—physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. By familiarizing yourself with your chakras, you become more aware of your own energy, and will easily recognize energy that belongs to someone or something else....'

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA BIBLIOGRAPHY (A descriptive bibliography of books and articles by and on Swami Vivekananda): By Dr Prabhu Shankara. Published by the Director, Prasara, University of Mysore, Mysore 570 006. 1999. Pages: (Demi Quarto) viii + 176. Price: Rs. 300.

Swami Vivekananda Bibliography is a painstaking bibliographical research of the available literature in English on and by Swami Vivekananda. It is divided into four parts: the first part mentions books, the second deals with parts of books and commemorative volumes, and the third part deals with articles in periodicals. Whatever known work was published before the end of 1998 on Swami Vivekananda finds place here. The beauty of the work is the alphabetical arrangement of topics related to Vivekananda studies. Under each subject, appropriate books, articles, etc, have been mentioned alphabetically in detail. The content in gist form of many books and articles have been printed alongside the work too. This will be a very useful addition to Vivekananda literature. Thanks to Dr Prabhu Shankara and the Director of Prasara for their efforts and service to students of Vivekananda.

A SHORT GUIDE TO MEDITATION: By Swami Harshananda. Published by Ramakrishna Math, Bull Temple Road, Basavanagudi, Bangalore 560 019. 2000. Pages: 32. Price: Rs. 5.

The author says: 'Life in this modern world is full of problems and tensions. The best solution to these tensions is to turn towards God in prayer. The Hindu method of prayer is dhyāna (meditation) and japa (repetition of the divine name). Here is an earnest attempt to present this subject, including some practical hints, in as simple a manner as possible. If it prepares the seeker after God for a spiritually oriented life, our purpose is served.'

News and Reports

Millennium Interfaith Service and Concert

The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York, USA, conducted a beautiful programme on 5 November 2000. At 11 am, there was an Interfaith Service at the centre, which was hosted by **Srimat Swami Adiswaranandaji Maharaj**, the centre's spiritual leader. Amongst the distinguished speakers were **Srimat Swami Chetananandaji Maharaj** of the Vedanta Society of St Louis, **Rev Francis J. Gasparik**, OFM, Caupchin of the Church of St John the Baptist, New York, and **Rabbi Joseph H. Gelberman**, The New Synagogue, New York. The speakers stressed the need for promoting interfaith dialogue for a better understanding of different faiths. The programme was concluded with musical offerings from the Centre's choir, led by the flautist **Rev Sal Tassone** from Santiago Yangco.

The same day, the centre organized yet another



inspiring programme: **The Millennium Concert at the Saint Peter's Church, New York City**. The performers were the renowned **The Yale Glee Club** (*see picture*), directed by **David H. Connell**. This music club, *comprising of 75 voices*, has been the ambassador of goodwill, touring different parts of the world and extending a tradition of friendship through song and underscoring the power of music to transcend barriers between nations. The Yale Glee Club specially concentrated on the theme of international peace and unity in the new millennium.

Both the programmes were well-attended. □

Centenary of the Prophet's Visit

Mayavati! The silent centre for Advaitic contemplation! There may be hundreds of religious places in India and elsewhere, but perhaps there is no centre that is dedicated only to Advaita. Unlike most other places, activities and busy lifestyle are not the practice here. There are innumerable other places for such things—busy routine, no-time-to-breathe lifestyle, etc. But this centre is for silent contemplation on the eternal Truth. And that was Swami Vivekananda's dream. This centre of his dreams was especially intended for Western and Eastern seekers of Truth. An adept in meditation since childhood, and a prophet that he was, Swamiji always wanted to lead a life of contemplation in the Himalayas. He naturally wished that sincere spiritual aspirants should have a remote place at Mayavati, away from the din and bustle and superactivity of city-life, to seriously practise spiritual

sadhana. If Swamiji would not dream of such a place of contemplation, who else would? His dream came true with the inauguration of the centre in 1896. It took almost five years for Swamiji himself to visit the centre of his dreams. **Swamiji came to Mayavati, after a strenuous journey, on the 3 January 1901 and stayed here till 18 January.**

To commemorate this event, a few monks and volunteers, numbering about 20 in all, led by **Swami Satyabodhananda** of the Ramakrishna Mission Calcutta Students' Home, Belgharia, Calcutta, visited the centre, travelling along

the same path—and on the same dates—which Swamiji had trod a century ago. Adventures in Religious life! They stayed at precisely the same rest-houses that Swamiji had stayed, thanks to the help rendered by governmental authorities. The team also helped the poor villagers whom they met on their way in many ways. After a two-day long journey, when the party reached Mayavati, they were welcomed warmly by the inmates.

The centenary of Swami Vivekananda's visit to Mayavati only reminds everyone of the lofty ideals that he had in mind and preached humanity. To follow his ideals is the duty of everyone of us. □